Herrod

RED SILENCE

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BY

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To Kathleen Anne

Who loves a kitfox, with her pencil broken,
  Her troubles, tumbles, sums absurdly reckoned,
Is paid in words of love confiding spoken
    at some odd second.

Who loves a kitfox in her rarer phases,
  Drinks from a river endless and surprising
Truths about men, philosophies, and daisies,
    and the Moon's rising.

RED SILENCE

CHAPTER I

"AND by the way—and by the way," Ellen Jackson suddenly exclaimed arrestingly. "I forgot to tell you! Perdita Patrick's come home!"

Everybody was busy; dinner was almost ready, and they were all helping to prepare it. But they all stopped working and turned about to look with amazement and pleasure, and in one case with a sort of instinctive fear, at Ellen.

The look of swift apprehension came from little Dory Garrison. She had in her hand an old flour bag that had been bleached and washed to shabby fineness and whiteness, and that was now filled with leaves of wet lettuce. Dory had been shaking the bag gently about to dry the lettuce, sending a fine film of cold water over the drain boards, and the shabby strip of studio wall above them, and over her own crisp apron and fresh, flushed, earnest little face as she did so. After a glance at Ellen she turned her back once more to the room. Their animated voices were confused in her ears.

"Dory," somebody said. "Imagine Perdita back! Doesn't that excite you?"

"Enormously," Dory said obligingly, in a faintly skeptical voice. "I don't know Perdita Patrick—I've never seen her—but I'm wildly excited——"

"You don't know her!" It was several incredulous voices at once.

"No, I've never seen her. Of course, since he went abroad last year Bruce hasn't talked of anyone else. But I've never seen her."

A mild babel broke loose, after which it was generally conceded that Dory spoke truly.

"That's right. Dory was away with the Gilbert and Sullivan people."

"That's right, too."

"Well, but Perdita was here a deuce of a long time," Foulke Fosterman protested, puzzled, looking up from the table where he was idly waiting.

"Only one winter."

"And Dory was away that whole winter."

"That's right."

"You'll be crazy about her, Dory," Mabel Cutler said, in her wistful, sickly young voice.

"I know it," Dory assented amiably, her back still to the room. She wondered why no one asked where Bruce was; wondered if Perdita's return had anything to do with his tardiness to-night. Perhaps he had gone to get Perdita; she lived with what, according to all reports, was a strangely commonplace and uninteresting family, over in Brooklyn. Nothing about her sounded thrilling—but what was the use of reiterating that in one's own thoughts? The unknown, unseen Perdita *was* thrilling, there was no denying that, explain it as one would.

Nobody spoke about Bruce, and preparations for dinner went forward briskly in the big studio. Dory shook her crisp dry lettuce into a big bowl and began to mix a dressing. She put the bowl on the dining table and lifted the glistening green leaves high above it as she tossed and turned them. Foulke, dishevelled, lazy, and affectionate, smiled at her as she did so.

The room was the entire establishment of Ellen and Ross Jackson, artists. Their unsold canvases, facing against the baseboards, lined the walls. A lofty skylight in the slanted ceiling had been screened against the hot afternoon sunlight with a battered green shade that was worked by numerous pulleys and strings. Two easels stood near a model throne; against the walls there were several couches, of which two formed the Jacksons' beds by night. Ellen

cooked in a corner at a shelf, with a two-burner gas stove on it; next to it was a small sink. A cake of perfumed soap and two toothbrushes in a glass on a shelf above the sink revealed the fact that this corner was also the dressing room.

The long table ran at an angle from the sink corner and was surrounded by miscellaneous chairs, pieced out by one of the couches. There was a small fireplace in the room, its mantel crowded by small objects: pipes, match cases, ash trays, photographs, sketches, sewing materials in an open sweet-grass basket, dilapidated books. When a meal was not in progress some of the table furnishings—pepper and salt shakers, spoon jug, napkins limp in rings—were also placed on the mantel.

A meal being imminent now, the seasonings had been put in the centre of the table, to which several persons occasionally added other things—fresh, crusty French bread in long, oblique slices, mustard, dried figs and dates, pickles, sliced tomatoes. It was a hot night: the studio was a roof apartment, and very warm; the labourers panted and perspired as they worked.

Delicate little Mabel, who worked in a telephone office, and wrote beautiful poems in the hot, wakeful nights, always arranged the butter, fussing, studying it with her head on one side and half-closed eyes, placing it in the very middle of the table only by dint of raising herself to the tips of her toes and stretching gallantly over the plates and glasses. Tony Reppettino made the coffee. Tony was an artist, a black-haired, bearded, swarthy man whose skin was tobacco-brown and oily. Tony was forty-seven, and his pale, wide-eyed little wife but sixteen. Sonia was Walter Oliver's little motherless girl, and Wally—they never called him anything else—was younger than Tony and had no money and no particular talent—a second-

rate, indeed, a fifth-rate actor, always out of money and employment, so that he was delighted when Sonia married so young. They had been married seven weeks now, Sonia the pale and little and sweet-tempered, and smart, shiny, glittering Tony, but there was still an odd, strained look of bewilderment in Sonia's beautiful little-girl eyes.

Foulke was a newspaper man, making real money, holding down a real job, apparently without ties. He always brought a great deal of the food to Ellen's dinners, brought cheeses and cakes and broilers, and loved to sit idly, as he was sitting now, talking with the familiar group, watching them all, waiting to be fed.

The Jacksons' studio was high above the sweltering, swarming streets of New York's Bohemian quarter. By merely walking downstairs they would have found themselves in a very nest of restaurants, gaudy little basement places painted chrome yellow and wash-bluing blue, decorated with stencilled ravens and pirates and dolphins and a thousand other fantastic devices. Or they could have gone to any one of a dozen French and Italian *tables d'hôtes*.

But it was suffocatingly hot to-night. Much pleasanter to loaf and dawdle in the studio, especially as Foulke had appeared at a late afternoon hour with an enormous basket of small cold boiled lobsters packed away safely in cresses and ice, and immediately the word had gone forth, in the mysterious way the word had a way of spreading, "supper up at Ellen's."

And presently florid Tony and white-faced little Sonia and her fat, lazy father, always optimistic, always about to land a good part in a good play, had climbed Ellen's stairs, and Ross had leaped down them for cream, and up them again with the cream, and Gerald Griscome, a handsome, smirking young actor, had arrived with fresh stories of new

contracts, and Terry Mott, who excused his wildest excesses on the ground that his grandmother was a Quaker, had cut the cheese carefully, and little partridge-like Ellen, who tried so hard to be witty and epigrammatic and dashing and Bohemian, and remained so schoolmarmy and unexciting, had taken the lobsters, one by one, from their wet, cold retreat. And of course Dory Garrison had mixed the salad.

"My fingers just do a little giggle of joy every time they get down into this ice," Ellen said, with an air of wit.

Nobody laughed, and Foulke, to save Ellen's face, said seriously:

"It might be a good idea to rinse off some of those big pieces. It's too damn hot to go down those damn stairs for more ice——"

"Foulke, it's very provincial to say 'damn' so much," Dory suggested mildly. "If you are so poor in natural expression that——"

"Oh, cut it, darling. It's so hot!"

Dory fell silent, wiping her forehead with her arm.

"It's awful," she conceded presently.

"There's going to be a storm," Mabel Cutler contributed. "Oh, Dory, that's wonderful!" she said, sampling the salad.

"It sounds good, Wally," Foulke said, of a new play.

"It *is* good, boy," Wally answered with conviction.

"It sounds good," Foulke repeated.

He looked, while he spoke, at Dory, slim and small and preoccupied, as she put the salad on the table. "Anything turn up to-day, Dory?" he asked suddenly.

"Nothing—definite. It was too hot to hunt very hard," Dory confessed cheerfully, but not meeting his eye.

"You look pale, honey."

"It's the weather. I loathe it! It's just as if I'd have

to go straight up in the air and scream if it doesn't break," Dory said.

"What a night to fly, Dory!"

"Oh, wouldn't it be delicious? Oh," Dory exclaimed, with sudden inexplicable tears in her eyes, "how I'd like to fly to-night down to some beach—long and black, with the water slashing and slishing on it—miles of black beach——"

"I'd like to be cold to-night—arctic cold, with bergs slowly forming all round the ship, and northern lights streaming up," Ross Jackson said. "I'd like to be dying slowly of cold."

"I'm all for plenty of ice for the coffee—barrels and barrels of it!" Terry Mott said fervently.

"Lucky you, to have imagination enough to think of dying of cold, Ross, on a night like this, with the sun beating down like a brazen gong over our heads," Dory commented, in her slow, pleasant voice. "The whole town, as I came home to-night, was one enormous gasp. I've never smelled so many smells before! Onions—garlic—pavements—dirty clothes—coffee—ugh!"

"Dory," Foulke said seriously, "you ought to write."

She had seated herself at the table, her elbows resting on its bare boards, her chin cupped in her hands, and her eyes on space.

"Oh, I know it," she said gloomily.

"Well, why don't you try it? It's lots of fun," Foulke said simply.

"Fun! It must be the greatest fun in the world," Dory conceded cheerlessly. "But—I don't know." Her voice thickened and her eyes watered though she laughed. "I've tried so many things," she confessed suddenly.

"And done them all well, too," Mabel contributed loyally.

"I've tried acting, light opera, movies, continuity writing—I've really worked," Dory pursued. "I've been at it six—well, nearly six years, and I've had wonderful chances. But somehow——"

Sonia watched her, her innocent eyes rounded solemnly. When one married a prosperous painter at fifteen, one did not have to think of money.

"Why, when I first came to this town, Foulke," Dory, speaking as if they were alone, went on, "it seemed to me that there was nothing—nothing I couldn't do. I had a good part offered me before I'd been here a week, and then I did a magazine article about—" She glanced about the studio, shrugged—"about us—this sort of thing," she said. "And sold it—instanter. You remember, Terry, that was the year we all had our pictures in the papers for buying free meals for some of the little wops down here, and we took the circus over one night—— Sonia bugs her eyes," Dory broke off to say, smiling, "but I assure you we did. And then, while I was still playing uptown, they got me into matinées at a neighbourhood theatre over on Christopher Street—do you remember, Foulke?—and Ross did a wonderful poster about it. Why, I used to write home to a girl I'd been in school with," Dory said, "and I know that she and her mother used to think I was making things up. We *all* seemed to be just buzzing then—what's the matter with us now? We're just the same people."

"Foulke had just gotten on the newspaper then," Ellen said, with a little sigh and a glance for him.

"Yes, and Ross was going to do posters for Goldenberg!"

"Oh, gracious, do you remember those posters for Goldenberg?"

"And I hated Roberts' very bones," said Foulke. "We

all thought he was a washout, and we used to wonder how much longer he'd be city editor."

"And how much longer was he?" Tony's little wife asked expectantly.

"He still is, honey."

"I didn't amount to anything then, and I don't now," Terry Mott said, laying his head down on his folded arms, with a great yawn. "*Gosh*, how hot it is!"

"Do we eat, or is this a political banquet?" Foulke asked.

"Well, it's seven. Where are they?" Ellen asked, glancing up at the skylight, against which the hot day still blazed.

"The point is, Foulke," Dory pursued, under cover of a desultory but general conversation. "The point is, do we gain—are we getting anywhere?"

"Well," he answered cautiously, "where—are we trying —to get?"

"That's just it," she said eloquently.

"When I married," said Foulke, "I bought a little place at Plandome; I thought I'd settle down, and Grace would go in for ice-cream freezers and vacuum cleaners and kids and what not. I even went to a poultry show when I was first married. I thought maybe we'd have a few Buff Orpingtons, or something. I give you my word," he assured her seriously.

"I believe you," she said, with a rueful little laugh.

"We buy a house—we settle down—we have a kid," pursued Foulke, falling suddenly into the dramatic tense, "finest little girl—well." He paused. "She was an awfully cute little girl," he said, his eyes far away.

"Mother got her still?"

"I believe she's in school in Switzerland. And for me, now," he finished, with a rather unpleasant tenseness gathering suddenly about his mouth. "for me, now——"

He indicated the group and the studio as she had done. "Why not?" Foulke concluded. "Pleasant, amusing, lots of good shows, friends——" He stopped, looking at her. "What more can you have?" he asked.

"Everything," she answered.

"Well, what?"

"Oh . . . " Her voice trailed off vaguely. "Real things," she offered.

"How d'you mean, real things?"

"Home. Kids. Ice-cream freezers and vacuum cleaners," she offered, with a steady look.

"But, my dear child—why, but this is delicious!" Foulke said. "These things you have, then, aren't real?" he asked.

"No."

"Not real? To live in the biggest city, and go about with the men and women who do things——"

"Foulke, if you knew how I detest that phrase! Do things! And when all's said and done, what do we do? Ellen sketches fashions at fashion shows, Mabel gets a sonnet into *To-day's Lyre*, I open in the soubrette part of a second-class show that squeezes out an existence of seven weeks. You review plays that everyone forgets next year —in ten years nobody'll remember that any one of us ever was alive."

"Well, how many lives are remembered after ten years?" he challenged lazily.

"Lots!" she answered promptly. "Lots of persons are building with bricks—we're building with straw. Homes and kids—mothers beginning to think about schooling—country doctors getting to be more and more known, and more and more trusted every year——" She stopped. "Why, pick up a magazine or a newspaper of twenty years ago, or of just a few years ago—of just the time you and I

were beginning here, Foulke!" she began again suddenly. "It's ridiculous! It's ringlety and hoopskirty! Somebody says that Anna Held is the greatest of all actresses, and that the *Dolly Dialogues* is a great book, and then we come along and laugh at them and rave about some other actress and some other book. We're just—just commentators on what other persons do," Dory formulated it slowly, feeling for words. "We aren't going to hand much on to the next generation."

"Let the next generation worry," Foulke said cheerfully.

"Ah, but that isn't fair," she said, shaking her head.

One or two of the others were listening now: Mabel with her anxious, strained face turned alternately from Dory to Foulke; Terry handsome and skeptical and indifferent; Wally Oliver avid, always alert for good dialogue and usable situations.

"My dear child, the people who live in the great cities and do things are the most envied persons in the world," Terry presently said with authority.

"I loathe that phrase," Dory commented again mildly.

"Let's eat," Tony, the swarthy, big, oily artist, suggested suddenly.

"We don't do much, and that's the truth," Mabel said hoarsely, timidly. "We're so busy doing things that we haven't time really to do anything," she finished innocently, uncertainly.

"Mabel, that's neat," Dory congratulated her with a rueful laugh. "Make a pome out of it."

"No, but I mean—really," Mabel pursued, encouraged. "Except, of course, Bruce," she added, sighing. Mabel had adored Bruce Macgowan for many years, and everyone knew it, Bruce and Mabel included.

"I'd like to know," Wally Oliver said, looking up with a

little smile that was more like a sneer, and speaking in a tired voice. "I'd like to know how you all get that way about Bruce. I've played in several big plays on Broadway —had one of my own that had a fair run. Foulke here has his following, Calhoun and Driscoll and a couple of the other boys have stories in the current magazines! Macgowan, as far as I know, hasn't done anything since 'Juggernaut' was produced—and rottenly produced—at a Village theatre, and ran for three weeks. Oh, yes, I beg his pardon," Wally interrupted himself punctiliously, "he did win a drama prize of one thousand dollars—I beg his pardon! Bruce," he went on, "has an income of six thousand a year, and can eat—and that, I imagine, is one reason why he can pose as the great American dramatist."

Dory Garrison, who had been studying her locked fingers, looked up at him levelly, steadily.

"And you wish that your whole body and brain had in them what Bruce has got in his littlest finger," she stated evenly.

There was a ripple of laughter about the table, and while Wally, discomfited, was heard to mutter triumphantly, "Exactly! That's the way you all seem to feel about Bruce—I don't know how he *does* it," Ellen ended the discussion by beginning to serve the salad briskly. Mabel passed the bread, and little Mrs. Tony the plates. Dory arose and began operations with empty glasses, an enormous bowl of chopped ice, and the smoking percolator.

"One sign of Bruce's genius is that he's always late for everything," Ellen said happily.

"Don't forget that he's escorting the siren here from Brooklyn!" Wally observed, answering the question that had been gnawing in Dory's heart for the last hour, even-

ing the score with her, and watching her with amusement as he spoke.

"Oh, Lord, it's hot!" Terry Mott said wearily. Dory distributed the clinking glasses filled with the creamy liquid in which ice slipped and settled. Her face was thoughtful, her blue eyes abstracted. She was wondering if they were teasing her less about Bruce than they did a year ago—two years ago? It was true. Nobody was teasing her about Bruce to-night. Well, and what of it? Teasing had no significance.

But for several years the mention of Bruce's name had been the signal to tease Dory Garrison. There had been a time when she had hated that teasing, had felt her breath quicken angrily, and her face flame, when their two names were linked together. But for the past few months—no, it was longer than that—for the past year——

Her thoughts stopped in a sort of sickness. They retraced themselves bravely. It was longer even than a year, it was two whole years since she had resented that happy knowledge, on the part of all their circle, that she and Bruce Macgowan were something more than friends; two whole years since the names "Dory and Bruce" had been as casually bracketed together as "Ellen and Ross," and "Terry and Firenze." "Well, what of that—what of that—what of that?" her heart continued to demand fiercely. Bruce wasn't like the other men—Bruce didn't show all that he felt——

There was a racket of feet in the bare hallway outside of the studio door, and Bruce and Perdita Patrick came in. Perdita was a dark, squarely built woman nearly thirty, with a white skin and a large mouth full of fine white teeth. She had on the palest of pink gowns, and a pale pink crushed small hat; she wore loose white gloves and carried a white bag, which she flung aside.

Everybody jumped up to greet her, and there was much kissing. They all knew her except Dory, and she and Dory, meeting for the first time, measured each other openly.

"Oh, that's what you look like, Dory Garrison?" Perdita said, in a rich slow voice that was oddly soft and easy. "Little and honey-colour. I thought you were—— I thought she was terribly blonde, Bruce," she said, turning toward Bruce. "I thought she was sort of handkerchief-box blonde, with red cheeks and blue eyes—and tall."

"No, she's just what you called her—honey-coloured," Bruce smiled. "She's never any bigger than that. She's an arrested development."

"She's lovely!" Perdita murmured, still holding Dory's hands, and looking down on her composedly.

Dory's heart was beating so violently that she could find only a smile for answer. She was appraising Perdita rapidly: beautiful, open dark eyes, strange big ugly square fascinating mouth, extraordinarily persuasive voice. Perdita Patrick, who had won the Hahnheim Prize, and had been enabled thereby to go to Paris to study, and who had it repeated the following year, by a most unusual concession, and who then had been sent into Russia to do some magazine work.

Perdita was fitted in at the table between Foulke and Terry; Bruce took his usual place beside Dory. She smiled at him.

"Any luck?" he asked.

"No. The Chicago company isn't doing so well, and they may close there and take on the coast trip themselves."

"Tough," Bruce said dreamily. "Well, it wasn't as if it had been a good part," he reminded her consolingly.

"No, it was partly wardrobe woman, and a little press agent, and a walk-on part," she assented. "Still, fifty a week is fifty a week."

"Damnable profession," Bruce said. "I hate it for you!"

The kindly concerned, proprietary tone made her heart begin to beat hard and painfully, and she said what she did not want to say.

"You mean—you mean that you care what I do, Bruce?" she faltered, with a gallant smile.

He looked at her surprisedly, annoyed.

"Don't be a little fool, Dory," he said, not unkindly. And immediately he drew her attention to something Perdita was saying. "Yes, about Russia! I want to hear that," he said eagerly.

"Well, I have been *wondering*," Perdita said, in her soft, almost inaudible voice, to which everyone must perforce listen attentively if he were to hear her at all, "I have been wondering if you and Dory there were finished hearing each other's confessions. I thought I had made some little impression," she explained pathetically to the company at large.

"You have, I assure you." Dory, rallying as best she might, said with a laugh.

"I doubt it," Perdita said, studying her thoughtfully. "You honey-coloured people are notoriously false. I see it is going to be a fight."

"Woman against woman," summarized Dory. But her heart sank . . . sank.

Two electric bulbs dangled over the littered table; the diners turned their chairs at all angles as they talked, and sipped the iced coffee, and ate the cold sweet lobsters. Dory Garrison was unusually silent, but if it were noticed, at least the absence of her ready, joyous voice was not missed, for Perdita was more than equal to the occasion.

Next to Ross, who was always a silent person, at the head of the table, Dory could sit back a little and watch and listen unobserved. Bruce was in marvellous form to-

night, not talking much, but guiding the conversation in his own brief, inimitable way, bringing out the points of the other speakers, his smiling dark eyes going from one face to another in encouragement and amusement. He was not a tall man, though he stood several inches over Dory, who was small; he was squarely built, hard and lean, with very black hair and an olive-skinned, thin face prominently boned, like an Indian's. His hands were hard and lean and brown, his smile sudden, reluctant, and very white in his dark face; he dressed with a little easy unconventionality. Bruce always looked comfortable and entirely unconscious of himself and what he wore.

He was but thirty; six years older than Dory. But young as he was, he had already made his mark; he had been in the city only three years, and already the critics and all lovers of true drama knew the name of Bruce Macgowan. But it was a part of Bruce's general extraordinariness that he was never in a hurry. He knew that life must come to him; he did not have to pursue it.

Dory remembered the night she had first met him. She had been working for three years then, but the fascination, the dramatic charm of the city's Latin Quarter had not yet worn thin. She had been one of the successful ones, for one thing; the stage, the press, literature, art, everything had seemed to be ready to welcome her. The name of Dory Garrison had been on everyone's lips then, as—well, as the name Perdita Patrick was now, she thought, with a wry twist of fear and pain at her heart.

She had gone for supper to Sally Austin's studio—just such a studio as this one. The Austins had prospered since and gone Republican, as Mabel put it, and lived luxuriously up in Westchester now; with twin children, and a car, and membership in a country club. But they had had their early struggles. That was long before the

days of the Jacksons, but Foulke, and Tony, and Tony's second, or maybe it was his third wife, and Wally, and Sonia, a wondering-eyed child of twelve or so, and Terry and Mabel, had all been used to gathering in the Austins' studio, even as they had gathered here to-night. And on this particular night Bruce Macgowan had come along, brought casually by somebody more familiar than he was with New York's Bohemia.

Bruce was a college graduate and a Rhodes scholar and a gentleman. He would have some money some day, from thrifty silk-spinning relatives in Massachusetts somewhere. He had sat next to Dory that night, as he was sitting now. She remembered his very first word to her.

"Tell me all about yourself, Miss Dory, and everything else that occurs to you, and let us get through the necessary preliminaries as fast as we can," he had said, in his unsmiling, unhurried way. "For I have a premonition that I am going to like you only too well!"

And after that—— Ah, well, it was only a commonplace, after all. Only one more man and girl in love, in the grim, hurried, uninterested city. Only magic again, magic streets where one walked, magic omnibus tops in which one rode all the way from the green park and the Arch, up, up, up, past the big park, with its feathery green tree tops, and so on and on into realms that were actually countrylike—in the spring, anyway. Magic shops with candy and flowers in them for a pretty girl to choose. Tobacco shops where Bruce bought his special kind of cigarette, and Dory watched him, and pastry shops where Dory bought her special kind of buns, and Bruce watched her. A glove shop, where her silly little lost chamois-skin gloves had to be carefully replaced; a big department store where he bought her an umbrella with a glass ball on the

handle, and she bought him two eighty-nine-cent neckties, for "unbirthday" presents. His amusement over her smallness; the fact that in the shops little serious Dory had to ask for twelve- and fourteen-year-old sizes.

Three years ago. And nobody had teased Dory about him to-night, nor for almost two years before to-night.

"And now what are you going to do, Perdita?" they were asking.

Dory's attention returned suddenly to the present moment. She saw the grimy old walls of the Jacksons' studio again with the last of a hot, lingering day's reluctant light pouring down through the skylight, and through the big north window. The table was mussed and tumbled now; most of the men were smoking, crushing their cigarette ends on saucers and plates. Far away somewhere thunder rumbled sulphurously; the air was heavy and lifeless. Tony's face, Terry's and Foulke's faces, shone glisteningly in the dimming light; Mabel looked ghastly. But Bruce showed all his usual dark coolness, the coolness of olive skin and smooth black hair, and Perdita was as fresh and unaffected as a child; her rich hair orderly, her dark eyes bright and interested, her pale pink frock and hat feminine and appealing as only pale pink can be. The colour of pink marshmallows—the colour of pale roses, Dory thought. The colour of dawn.

"I don't know just what I'm going to do," Perdita said. "My mother wants me to stay home for a while. I'll find a diggings somewhere around here and go up and see Treadwell."

"What could Treadwell give you?"

"Illustrating. He uses colour work in every issue now."

"Then no more travelling?"

"Well—they wanted me to go to China. But I don't know."

"And what about the young Englishman who did the writing part?"

It was Bruce who asked it. Perdita moved her serene eyes to his thoughtfully.

"That was the trouble," she confessed mildly. "He had —other plans. He had—ideas as to saving cabin space. He was—what you might call a marrying man."

There was a quick flash of appreciation about the table, but nobody laughed. It was not a laughing matter. Her eyes seemed to hold a strange topaz light in the dusk; her voice had strange notes. A great checked and sequinned and jewelled serpent might have such a voice.

"Men," said Perdita calmly, "are always falling in love with me."

The men spoke to her; the women were silent. Dory could not have said one word, to save her own life. She was struck dumb, as before a primeval force. She saw Perdita as something in its own natural form, as invincible as the thunder that was muttering and rolling far away toward the east. Perdita was lovely; she did not have to be catty to other women, she had nothing to fear. She was beautiful, but she had no real need for beauty—nobody saw her. The men who looked at her saw something beyond her, through her. And they desired her—all of them.

Dory saw it. And she saw herself, too, a pretty little girl with honey-coloured hair and blue eyes, one of several hundred thousand clever girls doing second-rate work fairly well in the big city, dressing picturesquely, posing, thinking herself tremendously real, until this girl whose pose was a little better done, who seemed even realer, swept the very ground from under her feet. Cheap meals in cheap restaurants that called themselves queer names and decorated themselves with cats and dolphins and witches, cheap successes to be followed by cheaper failures,

cheap talk—so much of it, so much of it!—about what one was doing, and what one intended to do. Hours and hours and days and months and years frittered away in the city that neither noted nor cared, and real living—real living eternally evading one.

A desperate anger at her own unsuccess suffocated Dory. She wanted to be essential somewhere, as Perdita was so evidently essential.

Perdita's insignificant water-colour notes—they were hardly sketches—had embellished the Englishman's articles about the New Russia. They had—yes, they had style. She had style, too; there was something unusual, something original about the clustering of her rich dark hair and the long cheek line, and the big charming mouth that showed the big charming teeth.

But then what did it matter—what did it matter what she had, or hadn't? . . .

"I didn't hear you, Bruce."

"Asked you why you were so quiet?"

"Oh, tired. It's been such a terrific day!"

"Devilish. I was wondering why we all didn't go down to Long Beach, or somewhere."

"Let's get out on a long, cold, dark road somewhere, and spin," Mabel said.

"It sounds wonderful," said Perdita. "Have we cars?"

"Cars can be hired for so much per hour or fraction of same," Bruce reminded them, in an unearthly flash of electric blue.

"There's the rain!" Sonia exclaimed, as a sudden gale of warm wind drove the curtains straight out into the dusky room like pennants, and a dry plushy patter fell on the dusty skylight.

"That means that Dory and I are here until it stops, Ross," Mabel said. "I wouldn't go home inside a bus

for love or money! But it'll be delicious on top after this."

She and Dory lived in the same neighbourhood, uptown. Bruce smiled at Perdita.

"I suppose, eventually, I'll have to take you home?" he said.

"Not at all. Somebody else must live in Brooklyn—we'll take a taxi," Perdita announced.

Nobody else lived in Brooklyn.

"You're right. We'll take the taxi, and I'll pay for it," Bruce predicted.

"How you do pamper your women!" said Perdita.

CHAPTER II

DORY, with a girl named Mildred Bence, rented a small furnished apartment in the West One Hundred and Fifties. Mildred was a trained nurse with grand-opera hopes. She rented a piano and went whenever she could to top-balcony seats at the Metropolitan. Sometimes Dory went, too; companionship with Mildred had proved a real musical education to her.

Even when Mildred was on a long case she still paid her half of the rent: thirty-two and a half dollars. Then Dory lived alone, telephoning down to a delicacy store for supplies. When both girls were home they kept a pencilled list of expenditures beside the neat little sink, and at the end of the week divided the sum scrupulously: so much ice, butter, gas, fruit.

When they first had found the flat it had seemed a great adventure to move in. Dory had just finished the run of "Goldenrod," the only real dramatic success with which she had ever been associated, and she had several hundred dollars in the bank. Mildred had been fresh from training school. They had laughed over every detail of egg beater and pillow slip, and Bruce had helped them, encouraged them, and indulged them. He had given them their Spanish salad bowl and plates, and the tall delicate yellow glasses from which they drank ginger ale and iced tea, and their little white fireless cooker, and their Chinese rug—in fact, Bruce had given them almost everything that was not already there. At Christmas he had appeared with some twenty parcels, the most imposing of which were two

fat satin comforters, peach colour lined with powder-blue, for their plain little beds.

"I think it is amazing what fun two girls can have in a perfectly safe, delightful way," Mildred had said more than once; "and how many really fine, thrilling men they can be friends with."

"Bruce is wonderful," Dory had conceded.

"Oh, marvellous! And *Mother* thinks so, too! Mother can't get over how wonderful he was to her during that visit. And they're all wonderful," Mildred would exult.

For Foulke and Terry and Wally and Joe Driscoll and Jimmy Calhoun and the Austins had all been familiar visitors to the apartment in those days, and Mabel and the Jacksons, too. It was called a three-room apartment, but the bedroom, bathroom, and kitchenette, each having a small window on an airshaft, would not have made one respectable room, all together. There was, however, the "studio," a large, fine, comfortable room with windows on a park, and an immense fireplace, and the studio atoned for all minor deficiencies.

Everyone had congratulated the girls on their find, then, but somehow the three intervening years had made it seem less gratifying. It was much too far away from the city—people were beginning to talk about penthouses—other persons were moving into engaging little irregular apartments over on the East Side, close to the river. Dory never went home without a mental protest against the hot, dirty subway trip, or the endless journey in a taxi or on an omnibus. Bruce had an enormous old-fashioned apartment on Fifty-ninth Street, with balconies over the Park. She never passed that neighbourhood without looking up at the dark blue rajah silk curtains—at this time of the year always blowing idly in and out of the big

windows—and wishing that her own establishment was so convenient.

For every day of the three weeks that followed Perdita Patrick's return to the city, Dory Garrison observed a certain routine. She got up at eight and took in the microscopic cream bottle and lighted the gas under the coffeepot. She looked in the smelly little tin box marked "Cake" and took out rolls or bread, and heated or toasted them. She called Mildred, who always slept until the last minute, and Mildred came out yawning and pretty in her pajamas, and the girls breakfasted together.

"Doesn't it seem hotter to you than it's ever been in summer before, Dory?"

"Well, honestly it does."

"It can't last forever, that's one thing."

"No, I suppose not."

Mildred cleared up the kitchen after breakfast, and Dory dressed herself carefully and went out into the broiling glare of the streets. A small, serious person, with blue eyes in a rather pale face, and honey-coloured hair pressed down under a white hat, a white-clad person with a touch of colour in her blowing silk scarf, she slowly and conscientiously went the rounds of the theatrical agencies, and followed up, besides, any hint of any other suitable employment that chanced to be given her.

She sat opposite agents and impresarios, smilingly, earnestly looking into their eyes. They told her that it was a little early in the season, and she said, yes, that she knew it was, but that she really needed the work.

Afterward she walked out into the dazzling bright hot empty streets again. At one o'clock she went into a tea room and had iced tea and a special salad. She got home at about four o'clock and took a bath and rested. At five or six somebody always telephoned, and Dory dressed

again, in the dim, warm, odorous flat, and peered at herself in the dim mirror, and closed the back door, always trying it violently to be sure that it was locked, and tucked the key out of sight on the gas-meter shelf.

Then she went downtown, far downtown, on the dim top of a green omnibus, swinging around the corners, smelling all the hot city smells of food and paving and heat, seeing the hot lights shining in food shops and the upstairs windows of the brownstone houses, where theatrical folk were dressing for the night. Some persons were sitting silent on the brownstone steps; a few others moved languidly through the oven that was the street. The river flowed languidly, looking pale and low in its banks.

The group, gathering at a restaurant for dinner, was slow and pale and languid, too. They usually met in some restaurant back yard, under trees. If Perdita was with them, as she usually was, Bruce was there, too. Sometimes Bruce was there without Perdita. Sooner or later her name always came into the conversation; Dory waited for it.

"She's been wafted away into Westchester by millionaires." "She's gone off on somebody's yacht." "She's down at Southampton," they would say. And Dory would feel a twist of pure agonizing jealousy at her heart. She never had known it in her life before; there had always seemed to be men enough—fun enough to go 'round.

If Perdita was not there, and not coming, then Bruce would be wonderful to Dory again, sit beside her, talk to her in his gentle, unhurried sort of way that never made a girl feel self-conscious or stupid.

"See Calhoun's article this morning?"

"They—they were talking about it."

"He's wrong, don't you think so?"

"Oh, Bruce, I'm so stupid about plays!"

"You? Why, I've never written one that isn't half you, if that means anything."

She might be silent from sheer inability to speak, looking at him voicelessly, swallowing, her little face pale with emotion under the garish arbour lights.

"I mean it, Dory. It's true."

"We did use to have fun, Bruce, quarrelling over them—writing things on the tabelcloth down at Little Hungary—when I was playing in 'Goldenrod,' *didn't* we?" she might venture wistfully.

"Those were the days! But don't talk as if they were all over, Dory."

"I feel as if they were," she once muttered thickly. But Bruce could not hear her, and when he asked her to repeat it she merely drooped her honey-coloured little head and said, "Nothing."

Sometimes, even now, he would carry her off to a summer show, or the try-out of a play somewhere near, in Stamford or Jersey City. And then Dory always waited her chance, and said carelessly, "Wouldn't Perdita like this! By the way, where is she to-night?" and Bruce, manlike, always fell innocently into the trap, and answered, "She's over with her family to-night," or "She had a date to-night."

And then the whole evening would go blank and tiresome and bitter to Dory, and she would drag herself through it like a bird with a broken wing.

"Have you met her people, Bruce?"

"Oh, yes, I was over there one Sunday night."

"Are they nice?"

"Yes. Awfully nice. Not—not like Perdita. Perfectly ordinary people, but nice. Hospitable."

"You—you think she's remarkable, don't you, Bruce?"

"Perdita . . ." She fancied he would say the word slowly,

as if its three lingering syllables struck like a chord in his heart.

If Perdita came she was charming to Dory. And Dory was helpless against her charm.

"Why don't you come up to the studio in the afternoons, you mouse, and we can come downtown together?"

"I'll do that to-morrow, then."

"No, not to-morrow. But any other day."

Perdita paid no especial attention to Bruce in the group. It was indeed one of her characteristics to concentrate upon the person, man or woman, who sat next to her, and inveigle him into a low-toned, absorbed conversation that made all the others feel somehow left out in the cold. But sometimes she had a word aside for Bruce, and sometimes Dory, her ears strained to abnormal acuteness, heard them.

"I was awfully sorry about—that thing, Bruce."

"It was all right. I understood."

"No. But I really was terribly sorry. It went completely out of my head."

"Well, I'm glad you don't think you have to lie to me about it."

And Perdita would raise her strange, thoughtful dark eyes to his, and smile the smile of a person who could not lie to anyone, under any circumstances. Not that Dory felt that she did, nor that it would have mattered. It was only that she marvelled sometimes at Perdita's genius for making everything that she said and did noticeable—things that other women took quite for granted.

One burning Sunday morning in August Dory came downtown on an omnibus top in mid-morning. She went to Bruce's apartment in Fifty-ninth Street, and stood downstairs waiting for the summons to come up, with her heart

beating violently in her breast. She could not have said, at the moment, whether she feared most that he was there or that he was not there.

Bruce was at home; Miss Garrison was to come up. Dory found Foulke Fosterman in the studio, and another newspaper man named Bray. They were delighted to see her.

"Did you bring cream, girl?"

She displayed a bottle, opened a bag of buns.

"Bruce making coffee?"

"Bruce is dressing."

"Oh, then I'll start things." She went into the kitchen and was instantly and familiarly at work. The shade at the window was drawn; there were glasses and squeezed lemons in the sink. Foulke sauntered out and helped her, and went away again, and after a while Bruce came out and kissed her.

"This is a cute thing for you to do, Dory."

She smiled, but said nothing. She had not done this for months. But on the last occasion he had not thanked her, he had said that she had a nerve to break into a man's apartment this way. How far away that exquisite moment of easy scolding seemed!

"Do they want eggs? Foulke almost always does," she said, with a jerk of her head toward the studio door.

"Oh, they've gone."

A blank moment; she stared at him.

"Foulke and Mr. Bray?"

"Yep. They'd had their breakfasts. They had to be at some picture opening at eleven."

There was no help for it. Her chance had come, and she must seize it.

"I'm glad they've gone," she said tremblingly. "Because I came here to—ask you something, Bruce."

"Fire away," he said easily. But she saw a wary glint come into his eye, and the colour come up in two spots in his dark face.

"Bruce—it's this," she faltered desperately, all her prearranged sentences failing her now that the dreaded moment had come, and she was actually in his presence. "Is it—is it my fault?"

He would not help her; he looked down at her dispassionately, and Dory thought she would die under the look. He was frowning slightly, slightly biting his lip.

"Is *what* your fault?"

"That——" she swallowed. "That you don't like me—as much as you did?" she stammered.

"My very dear little girl——" Bruce was beginning, in a bored tone. But suddenly some secondary impulse interrupted him, and he took his hands from her shoulders and turned to the coffeepot and carried it into the studio.

"Bring some rolls, everything else is here!" he called back over his shoulder. "Sit down and have your coffee, Dory," he said, "for I want to talk to you, too."

She sat opposite him, and poured his coffee and her own, and even managed to swallow some, but she could not eat. She was trembling violently, but not conscious that she trembled. Her eyes, fascinated and fearful, never left his face. But she was as conscious of the studio as if she had been looking about her. Conscious of the big piano in the shadows, and the books aligned on the high shelves, and the great fireplace, and Ross's and Ellen's sketches, and the great writing table whose drawers were always bulging with manuscripts.

There was more than one small, well-bound copy of "Juggernaut" on the shelves, and a poster of "Juggernaut" over the mantel, and a framed programme of the opening performance, with some of the reviews bound

in the same frame. But "Juggernaut" was old history; it was the new play, "Vermilion," that absorbed Bruce now. She knew he was working hard at it; he must be discussing it with somebody. But not with her.

"Here's the thing," said Bruce, finishing his coffee, satisfied with half a roll. "You're making yourself perfectly miserable over something, and I can't help thinking—" he smiled at her suddenly—"that part of it is me," he finished.

The direct attack disarmed her, and she had a forlorn impulse toward tears.

"Well," she began a little thickly, "it's partly that I'm so—so sick of being out of work."

"Isn't that the season, Dory? It's a rotten season. But wait until the first real nippy week arrives, and the leaves begin to drop, and everything opens up with a boom."

She smiled shakily, undiverted.

"It didn't last year, Bruce."

"Well, you were out of luck last year. You had that rotten start, and then all that rehearsing——"

"And then when they changed the play and needed a big strong woman," she reminded him with a rueful laugh, "when they decided that Olivette simply had to knock a man down, I was automatically——"

"Ejected," he supplied. And with a gesture familiar to her now he stretched a hand for pencil and paper. "The Automatic Ejector," he wrote. "Morris could use that in some of his stuff," he said.

Dory watched him. Her throat still felt sore and salty and thick, the roots of her eyelashes wet, her nose stung.

"You can't seriously think," said Bruce, "that when the season opens you won't get a job?"

"There are so many of us who don't," she said wearily.

He reflected upon this, faintly frowning.

"It would be wonderful to have a real winter-and-summer job," Dory said.

"You know," Bruce exclaimed suddenly, "my own conviction is that you can write, and that you ought to write!"

Dory smiled again; she seemed to have no refuge but a smile on this horrible, hot, dry summer morning, with the sunshine bombarding the drawn shades in the studio and the baking city very still under a sky of brass.

But her soul was sick. It was so easy for these successful persons to tell one what one's real vocation was. Films, stage, newspaper offices, reviews, press agencies, magazines —how she had struggled to find a place among them all!

"Never," the man said, "never have I met anyone who can put her finger on the weak spot in a scene or a dialogue the way you can. It's uncanny. It's a gift."

She looked about the room, remembering the birth of "Juggernaut," with Foulke walking the room restlessly, and Ellen and Ross sunk in deep chairs, listening, and Bruce, pale and thrilled and intense, and as always handsome, at his manuscript, reading to them all. Her little self, in the creamy velvet dress she had worn in "Goldenrod," had been sunk into the big red chair, her knees tucked under her, the enormous wood fire crackling only a few feet away, the snow tickling cold and blue against the studio windows. Ah, dear God, how could anyone believe, on a burning Sunday like to-day, that there were delicious sharp, icy winter days coming back again, and rosy girls gasping in furs, and great fires roaring, and men and women loving each other!

Only three years ago, "Juggernaut." Only three years ago she had been that happy, successful little actress of the long run of "Goldenrod," so welcome, so infinitely welcome to this room.

Remembering it, to-day seemed like a nightmare.

"Now you have got to pull yourself together, Dory," Bruce was saying, mildly and kindly. "You're losing your grip. I see it, and everyone sees it."

Salt in her throat and prickling at the roots of her eyelashes. And again her gallant, apologetic smile.

"Oh, I know it."

"Well, then," he said simply, logically, good-humouredly, lightly, "stop it."

Dory locked her little hands together before her, fixed her wistful, helpless blue eyes upon him.

"It's—it's feeling that somehow—I don't matter to you any more, Bruce," she began bravely. She stopped short.

"That's nonsense," he said briefly, yet with a faintly uncertain note in his voice, too.

"Bruce, *is* it?"

"Is what?"

"Am I—am I a fool for thinking that—there's a difference?"

"You're all wrong—you're absolutely a little fool if you think I'm anything but the warmest, the most loyal friend you've got, Dory," he said slowly, after a while, not meeting her eye. His glance was upon the cigarette he was grinding out against a little copper tray.

"But it has seemed to me," she said, in a nervous swift effort, "it has seemed to me that—that isn't enough."

For a moment, still not meeting her look, Bruce was silent, his handsome face moody, his brows faintly drawn. Then with a little visible determination he said, glancing up evenly,

"What would be—enough?"

"Everything, I suppose," she said with a desperate little laugh, after a long minute.

"Haven't we discussed that, Dory?" Bruce said.

There was a silence, during which her sensitive face flushed as if he had reproved her.

"You mean Margaret?" she asked, in a low voice.

"What else?" Bruce asked sharply.

"You mean—that if it *weren't* for Margaret——" She was formulating it.

He shrugged.

"Well, since Margaret is there—and no worse—and in fact, better," he offered eloquently.

"Is she really, Bruce?"

"No worse, anyway. The last time I was there—oh, my God, do we have to talk about it?" he said impatiently, his face whitening.

"Did she know you, Bruce?" Dory knew it would be easier for him in the end if he could talk about it.

"They said she had asked for me, looked at my picture—something like that," he answered gloomily. "But when I got there I couldn't see any change."

"But they think she may get better?"

"They say so. Anyway," he said stubbornly, "it isn't her fault. Her mother knew it—the old man never even dreamed it. He just thought it was nerves. And it was my fault—it was my kid, after all," he added moodily. His breast rose and fell on a deep impatient sigh.

"But, Bruce," Dory persisted, "if I could feel—as I used to feel, that if it *weren't* for Margaret——"

He looked at her darkly, scowling.

"But what difference does it make, since there *is* Margaret?" he asked, with a sort of angry patience.

She was silent. Her face was pale from the day's overpowering heat, her soft, fair hair plastered against her forehead and crushed down; she had taken off her hat.

"Of course, we were never engaged, you and I," she mused aloud, in a voice of pain.

"How *could* we be?"

Dory reflected on this, too, and then looked up at him with her small anxious child's face determined and courageous.

"Then—then who could be more—more of a friend to you than I am?" she insisted.

"Exactly," said Bruce, in a tone of acceptance and relief.

The girl left it there for a minute, but her eyes were troubled, dissatisfied, and resentful.

"I seem to mean so much less to you than I did, Bruce," she recommenced, after a silence, "and it—worries me so."

He sighed again, and reached for his cigarette holder, and it was as if he had picked up a knife.

"Well, we knew that, didn't we?" he said steadily, with a level look.

Colour came into her face, her eyes flashed, her breast rose quickly.

"We knew—what?" she whispered fearfully.

"Well, that——" The movement of his shoulders was eloquent. "We knew that—how shall I put it? That the city, and the lives of professional folk, are full of changes, Dory. That creative artists—like you and me——"

"Oh, creative artists!" she said, in a quick fearful whisper, as he paused.

"Aren't we?"

She was silent, looking away from him, her forehead wrinkled and her eyes blinking.

"Dory, isn't it so? Let's be reasonable. Isn't it so?"

Another pause. Then she said slowly, hopelessly:

"Yes, I suppose it's so."

"And what of it?" Bruce demanded, with an air of cheerfulness. "We have friendship left, haven't we? We had a case—a crush—a few years ago——"

"Oh, *please*, Bruce."

"Why do you say, 'Oh, please, Bruce'?" he asked. In his heart he kept saying, a little frightened and agitated, but in deep relief, "There, now she knows. There, it's said. She knows." But outwardly he was only a perfectly cool young man, dark and handsome and squarely built, looking with the utmost kindness at the little girl who was watching him steadily across the breakfast table.

Dory did not speak again. The silence crept and deepened and widened about them like a mist at sea. She got up and went to the window.

Outside and below the studio windows the city was silent and dirty and shadowless in noon heat. There were motionless groups in the Park, in the heavy, clothy shade of the unmoving leaves. A woman, with a man beside her, was wheeling a baby carriage through a stretch of open sunshine. Dory could hear a Victrola, or perhaps it was a radio, droning—droning—droning in the stillness. The very shadows to-day seemed to give off heat waves and throb with light.

"I've got to telephone," Bruce said suddenly. He went to the telephone and called a number, and asked for Joe Driscoll. "Say, Joe, are you taking that two o'clock for Philadelphia?" he asked. "Gosh, boy, it's pretty hot to go anywhere. . . . Yes, that's right, too. That's right, too. . . . All right, old boy, I'll meet you there."

Dory glanced at her wrist. It was ten minutes past twelve.

"I've got to go, Bruce."

He came with her to the studio door, his fingers already untying the tassels of his dressing gown.

"Buck up, little girl. This is only one of the down times!" he said.

"I know."

"You'll have a job this time next week and be laughing at yourself."

"I suppose so."

"And as for you and me," Bruce said, on a slightly more serious note, "why, you know what I think of you. You *know* what your criticisms meant to 'Juggernaut.'"

She was going to cry again, and she was sick and tired of crying, bored—bored—bored with crying! It was the horrible weather that made her head ache and her eyes hurt—or maybe it was the coffee. She managed a misty smile, nodded her head, and ran down the stairs. It was only three flights, much simpler than to wait for that odious darky and his elevator.

Small and dazed, in her white dress and white hat, with the brilliant note of colour in the scarf, she went out into the blaze of the day and walked somewhat unsteadily to the Plaza, and crept into its enormous shadowy coolness. The lunch room was a-buzz with late breakfasters, joyous chorus girls and young theatrical folk, who were presently going to rush off into Westchester and down to Long Island's beaches. How happy they all were—every girl in a costume that seemed to her more expressive, more original than the richest or newest in the room. Dory knew their mood; she remembered other Sunday mornings when the heat had seemed merely an agreeable accentuation of the day's delights.

She sat in a deep, chintz-covered chair for a long, long time, motionless, staring vaguely ahead of her, not thinking, hardly conscious.

After a while, as if propelled by an electric shock, she sprang up and went to the telephone booths. Feverishly, drumming with her foot impatiently as she waited, she called Joe Driscoll's number.

"Joe's gone out of town," his friend who shared his apartment told her sleepily.

Cool relief poured into her heart. It was true, then. Joe had of course left to get the Philadelphia train.

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Diver."

"Yep. Joe went up to the golf club yesterday, and he 'phoned me that he was going to stay all night and play again to-day! Too hot, I call it . . ."

The voice droned cheerfully, drowsily on and on. Dory heard nothing. She hung up the receiver and stood, reeling, afraid only that she might fall. Paul Diver, the fool—the fool—why couldn't he have said that Joe was out of town, and left it at that?

Suddenly she was whirling through the leaves of the telephone book. The Vermeer Studios. The boy on the switchboard.

"No'm, Miss Patrick ain't here. She jus' lef' about half an hour ago. She says she's goin' to Philadelphia, an' if her fam'ly 'phoned, please to say she'd be back to-night."

A moment later Dory was at the hotel doorway and into a yellow taxi. It ran smoothly, noiselessly down a wide street where even the green omnibuses were few and languid in this merciless hour.

The Pennsylvania Terminal. More wide shadows, and more movement here. There were lunchers, redcaps, travellers, suitcases, and baggage checks in motion, even on an August Sunday.

Dory hardly knew what she had intended to do here; she did not have to think. She had hardly reached the great concourse before she saw Perdita, waiting; Perdita, cool and dark in some tan-coloured thin frock and loose coat, with a scarlet flower on her shoulder.

Dory felt herself shake with pure, unreasoning terror; she felt cold and sick. She went irresolutely, instinctively,

toward shelter—seeking a column, an inconspicuous seat, the screening of the crowd.

She sat down dazedly, swallowing, trying to look natural. A woman near her moved on the long bench; Dory sent her a glazed smile. Obliquely, and at some distance, she could still see Perdita, standing quietly, comfortably, expectantly, in her tan gown with the red flower on her shoulder.

"Not Bruce. Not Bruce. Not Bruce," Dory kept whispering in her soul. The woman near her, tending two restless, hot, small babies whose burning-red wet little faces were blotched with prickly heat, glanced at her curiously. Dory wondered if she had spoken aloud.

Presently Bruce walked across the concourse, and he and Perdita smiled into each other's eyes with no surprise, with infinite content. They wheeled together, and went off across the open space toward the gateway to the trains.

Bruce showed his tickets; they went through. They would lunch in the shaded dining car; Perdita would put her elbows on the table and look at him, glowing, under her tan hat, her splendid face, with its ugly big charming mouth, amused and happy and utterly at ease.

Dory walked up the wide stairway and past the lunch rooms and out into the city again. She walked slowly, sometimes stopping, talking almost audibly to herself. She bought a magazine with a bathing girl on the cover, realizing that she had already seen it somewhere, but saying to the dealer painstakingly, "I've seen the cover. But I'm certain I've not seen the magazine."

Then she got inside an omnibus and rode home, looking out at the hot ugly streets and the perspiring, ugly persons in them, and smelling the horrid midday smells of frying onions and burning eggs and asphalt and rubber tires. She glanced at the bathing girl on the cover of her maga-

zine once or twice, she even opened it hurriedly, indifferently, more than once, but she did not read it—the letters danced, little black balls before her eyes. Once she had a sharp, terrifying sensation of nausea, and always she felt weak and tired and beaten, but somehow she got home.

Even the big room looked stuffy and dark, shuttered and shaded against the light; the other rooms were insufferable little odorous cubicles, dreary places of mussed pillows and sticky woodwork and drifting Sunday newspapers. A fly was walking about a streak of spilled marmalade on the kitchen table. The sink gave forth a horrible smell of plumbing.

Dory lay down on her bed, staring at the ceiling.

"It's all over," she said once out loud in a conversational tone. "Bruce Macgowan and me. It's over. It—feels funny."

She looked at her book shelf . . . red novels, black-and-gold novels, ranged in rows.

"Those books are full of it," she said half aloud, "only it seems so different in books."

After a while she got up and went to the sink and drew herself a glass of water. She chipped off a piece of ice, and swung the glass about slowly, sipping the drink. She wet a towel and sponged her face and felt the tears well up inexhaustibly, as if there were no end to tears—flowing rivers of them.

"Oh, my God, I don't know what I'm going to do!" she whispered, wandering desolately into the big room, letting up a shade. The sun was gone from the front of the house but no air moved in through the open window; the day remained sultry and breathless.

"I'm so sick of this *heat!*" Dory said, suddenly furious.

Her heart felt wounded and heavy, she breathed with short, shallow sighs.

Mildred Bence came into the flat at about six o'clock. Dory was lying on her bed again, her swollen sombre eyes fixed aimlessly on the ceiling. She turned in the dimness and spoke first, thickly and unsteadily, knowing that at Mildred's first words she would begin to cry again.

"That you, Mil?"

"Oh, Dory!" Mildred cried, rushing to her, and dropping to her knees to embrace Dory, and press a cool soft cheek against Dory's hot, flushed, salt-burned one. "Oh, Dory, David's been here—Dory, he cared all along—he's been suffering worse than I have. Oh, Dory—look at me —I'm going to be married to-morrow—and you're going to be my bridesmaid!"

"Mil, I'm so glad," Dory said slowly and thickly. Mildred noticed nothing amiss.

"Lissen, I was lying here as blue as indigo," she recounted swiftly, "and the telephone rang. I thought it was for you, and I sort of dawdled out to it, and it was David. 'Oh, what are you doing at home?' he said. I said, 'Did you telephone because you thought I wasn't at home?' 'No,' he says, 'but I haven't telephoned for some little time, and I thought I'd like to know how everything was going.' I says, 'Little time? You haven't telephoned me for exactly seven months; it was January when you telephoned me!' And it *was*, Dory, because you remember . . ."

Mildred settled comfortably back on her heels, holding Dory's hands, pouring the story forth ecstatically. Dory looked at her sombrely, now and then smiling, now and then surreptiously swallowing at the hard, hot lump in her throat.

David was going to Berlin for a whole year—imagine, working. Sailing Tuesday—imagine. Imagine if he hadn't just happened to call, imagine if she had been out!

Picturing such things, Mildred grew weak, and laid her head against Dory's shoulder, shuddering.

"When I think of how wretched I've been, and how weeks and weeks at a time I'd wait here for the postman," Mildred mused, in a luxury of reminiscence. "Dory, if you knew what it *felt* like—to be eating lunch at the Casino and looking out at all the flowers and the people driving by, and to think it was David—*David*—right there, in the flesh . . . I'll be Mildred Morbein—I think it sounds kinder cute . . . Dory, I feel as if a thousand-ton weight had been lifted off me. I'm twenty-seven, after all, and I've liked Davy Morbein for almost seven years. I was just beginning training when I met him at Carnegie—the sickest-looking fellow you ever saw. He looked stunning to-day—and, my dear, it's pathetic. He's afraid he'll die before to-morrow. Imagine! You know, Dory," Mildred began again animatedly, after a short pause, "you know the stage where you just can't bear to think how long ago it was that you were happy?"

She fell silent, and Dory said mildly:

"Yes, I know that stage."

"I mean, you think 'It's only a week since he 'phoned, it's only two weeks——'"

"Yes, I know."

"You say to yourself," Mildred pursued, "'Oh, well, maybe he's busy, maybe he's out of town'—you kind of kid yourself along."

"I know how you mean."

"And then suddenly it comes over you, like—like having a truck collapse on you," Mildred went on, with simple eloquence, "that it's *over*, nothing going to happen, he simply doesn't care! You say to yourself that he's had fifty chances to telephone or see you, and that he's not such a dumb-bell that he couldn't get in touch with you

if he wanted to, and it just gives you a sort of *gone* feeling—a sort of sick feeling—and you say, 'Well, I guess that's that. I'm twenty-seven, and some day I'll be thirty-seven, and—well, that's that."

"It's terrible."

The words fell pathetically, softly, in the silence of the shaded, dim, ugly little room. Mildred seized upon them enthusiastically.

"Terrible! I'll say it's terrible."

She heaved a long happy sigh of relief and pride.

"Dory, I'm so happy I just can't believe it's me."

"It must be wonderful."

"Wonderful!" She scorned the word. "Imagine me sailing for Europe with my husband," she said, after a pause. "And only this morning I was wondering why I was alive!

"You know," Mildred added, as Dory, staring into space through tear-pointed lashes, rubbing her thumb slowly back and forth over Mildred's hand, remained silent, "you know you feel so *settled*, Dory, as if you'd gotten your job. 'Now,' you say, 'it's up to me to make something of this, I've got to make good, I've got to start all over again. I'm *settled.*'

"He's about the craziest fellow in this city to-day," she mused, a wife's indulgent soft laughter already in her voice.

"He must be."

"He says he was thinking about me just the same way I was thinking about him."

Mildred got to her feet, and went over to the mirror, and laughed.

"I don't see what he sees in me; you'd think I was Greta Garbo to hear him go on," she observed, with a little shamed laugh.

"If it comes to that," Dory said promptly, "your children will take after Mother, if they have any sense."

Mildred laughed delightedly.

"I think he's nice-looking," she persisted happily.

"He's darned *nice*," Dory substituted seriously.

"Oh, well." Mildred knew that. "From the first moment my eyes ever fell on him . . ."

She was off again. She came back and sat on the bed, near Dory's upcurled feet, and began about David, from the beginning.

"Been crying, Dory?" she asked, after a while.

Dory nodded, suddenly speechless again.

"Bruce?"

Another nod; Dory's eyes were brimming, her lips shut tight.

"Ah, too bad!" the rich and fortunate Mildred said sympathetically.

"Dory, is it Miss Patrick?"

"I guess so."

"Can't you just—brazen it out—carry it off somehow—beat her at her own game?" Mildred asked, troubled, feeling for words, watching Dory's blotched face anxiously.

"Oh, you know you *can't*, Mil," Dory said, with effort.

"No, I s'pose you can't. But it's such a darned shame!" Mildred exclaimed warmly. The other girl did not speak.

"She doesn't want him," Mildred said darkly, after thought.

"Maybe she does," Dory said slowly, turning the knife.

"She gives me a great big royal pain," said Mildred.

There was a silence. Far below the opened windows they could hear men's voices crying the inevitable Sunday afternoon extras. A faucet in the kitchen dripped and dripped. A Victrola was playing upstairs. The room was very hot.

"I'll tell you what I'm going to wear," said Mildred suddenly. "I'm going to beat it down to Steindorff's the first thing in the morning, and get that blue ensemble—the spotty one that was too long. 'Member? And then I'll chase up to Eva's and match it to a hat, and take it to Miss Younger—she'll shorten it in a rush for me. And then I'll have my hair done and my hands done——"

"Got money, honey?" Dory said, affectionately sympathetic. "I've got piles in the bank, you know; I'd be tickled to death to let you have a few hundred—anything you wanted."

"I don't need it, Dory."

"What time is the big event?"

"Well, we lunch together at one o'clock—and you, too! And then we go down to the City Hall, to get a license, and then to the Federal Building to get passports for me—Dory, imagine! He's engaged a cabin anyway, so that part's all right."

"You might blush, saying that, Mrs. Morbein!"

"Oh, you shut up. So I suppose," Mildred, delightfully fluttered and distracted for a minute, resumed resolutely, working it out, "I suppose we'll be married at about five, maybe."

"And sail Tuesday?"

"Oh, Dory, it seems as if it was somebody else!"

"Old girl, I'm awfully glad it's come out this way," Dory said. "You're no more the sort that ought to be in this devilish place, trying to make a go of it on your own, than—well, than I am," she ended unexpectedly.

"I'll be twenty-eight in October, and I've had enough of it!" Mildred said fervently. "I'm going to be the married-est person that ever lived. Socks—dishes—babies—and what Davy thinks—that's me."

"Go to it!" Dory encouraged her. Suddenly a new

thought struck her. "But, Mil," she exclaimed. "What about the little Pennoyer boy?"

"I'm going to wire them to-morrow!" Mildred said carelessly.

"But you've got passage and everything?"

"Yes, I know, but let them worry," Mildred said. "Let them get somebody else to take him. He's a dear little kid, and he's had a rough break, and I'd like to have done it for the trip, but after all, I'm not going to put off my wedding for ten little Porter Pennoyers—so that's that!"

"Oh, but *honestly*——" Dory said, and paused.

"I know," Mildred admitted reluctantly. "I know it's a mean trick. But I can't help it. I thought I'd telephone the Registry to-morrow, and see who I could get. We weren't going to sail until Saturday, and there are piles of girls who would jump at it, just for the chance of the trip to California."

"Is it San Francisco?"

"That's the port, yes. But they live in a place called Palo Alto; it's a suburb, or something. They seem like awfully nice people—they have scads, anyway," Mildred said in the same careless manner. She was already wearing the blue ensemble, wearing the plain gold ring that would be hers to-morrow. It was no longer her problem.

"Where's the little boy now, Mil?"

"They took him to the hospital the night of the accident, and they're keeping him there. Poor kid, he cries for his mother, and all that. She saved his life all right. They said she sort of doubled herself around him; he would have been killed if she hadn't."

"Oh, that's terrible!" said Dory, catching her breath.

"It's the limit," Mildred conceded absent-mindedly.

"They surely can get somebody before Saturday," Dory mused.

"They'll have to. I'm just going to wire, 'Plans changed. Cannot accompany child to California,'" Mildred explained unconcernedly.

After a while Dory said, "There's one more thing I want to do—to-night. No, to-morrow night. And if that fails, I'll take him."

Mildred looked at her, stupefied, opened her mouth to speak, closed it again, and continued to regard Dory with a widening light in her eyes.

"It would be an out for me," said Dory. "I have to get out."

"You take my ticket——" Mildred began dazedly.

"Your ticket, and the little boy, and everything."

"It would be running away?" Mildred whispered, staring.

"And that's what I have to do," Dory said.

"Dory, and wouldn't you tell anyone where you were?"

"No one."

"They'd telephone me," Mildred suggested.

"You'd be married, and in Europe."

"Oh, that's so!" Mildred exclaimed, brightening. "And, Dory, you'd love California," she added eagerly; "and you'd love the trip through Panama, wouldn't you?"

"Oh, Mil," the other girl said, turning her face on the pillow, her eyes suddenly brimming again, "if I go, I'll go —heart-broken. If I could think—if I could think that there was a chance——"

Mildred watched her sympathetically.

"Of things breaking here?" she offered.

Dory nodded. Her look moved slowly over Mildred's face, searching for hope.

"Well, of course it'll be all right," Mildred said heartenningly.

But there was no responsive light in Dory's eyes.

CHAPTER III

AND there was no real confidence in her heart. The mere thought of Perdita seemed to shake what courage she had; the fight was lost before the first gun was fired.

Monday and Tuesday she gave to Mildred, letting her own affairs drift, concentrating upon the thrilling business of getting the older girl married. When the dazed and tremulously happy Morbeins had duly boarded their steamer on Tuesday night Dory came back alone to the strangely empty apartment, and entered into immediate conference with the janitor, the agent.

Slowly and steadily she packed her own personal belongings—the Spanish plates and the silver coffee cups that Bruce had given her, her mother's books, some table linen, photographs, lamps.

On Wednesday night, coming home tired, she summoned her courage to call the Jacksons' number. No answer. Dory waited a little while and then called Perdita's number. No answer.

She felt as if they had snubbed her—slapped her in the face. The next day she was away again all day, and returned at dusk to make herself some iced tea, and set it forth on a tray, with a sandwich from the delicacy store to flank it. After her solitary meal she took a last look at the packing cases, closed and finished, and walked through the rooms emptied of her things with a serious face and dry eyes that wore a puzzled expression.

It was eight o'clock. Dory took her own chair to the window, and sat there staring out into the warm moonlight, listening to the noises in the restless, wakeful street.

Her thought roved vaguely to and fro; her mind was tired. The packing—the hot streets—the ship—the wedding . . . Now she was back in the shaded, empty waiting room of the hospital again, talking in low tones to Marie Pitcher and Mildred. Marie Pitcher was acting head nurse in the real head nurse's absence, and she was anxiously eager to have the matter of the little Pennoyer boy work out nicely. It would be a real *favour* if Dory would take him to California—Marie Pitcher had somewhat overstepped her authority in having him in the hospital at all—Miss Wrench, who owned and managed the Peacock Hospital, would be back from Maine on Saturday, and she might object—the hospital never had been planned to have boys of five domiciled in it . . .

Marie Pitcher had known Mildred since training days, and Dory ever since Mildred had graduated. She could trust Dory—and she dared not spare one of the nurses from the regular staff, because that would annoy Miss Wrench.

Dory said she would do it. She saw the little boy, a nice, scared, lovely little boy, and went to see the steamship company's officials far downtown about her passage.

And all the time her heart ached like some heavy, dragging thing at her body, and her head felt tired and stupid, and her strength was only water. Every time the telephone bell rang she flew to it. It rang many times on Monday and Tuesday—rarely during the next two days—but it was never Bruce.

So, staring out of the window, she had to think it all over seriously, by herself, on Thursday night. Friday would be her last day in the city in which almost all her life had been spent. Circumstances had usually guided her; before this she had drifted along their current happily. Now she had to make a decision.

Dory felt small and weak and undecided. There was a constant uncomfortable hammering at her heart, a constant flutter in her thoughts. It seemed simply fantastic to believe that she was really going to take a taxi on Saturday morning and call at the Peacock Hospital for the little Pennoyer boy and go on down to the pier and board the *Mongolia*.

Events went on and carried her with them. On Friday at noon she telephoned Bruce. His voice in answer to hers was so calm and kindly and pleasant that it made her feel almost giddy.

"Foulke's coming up to dinner, better come yourself," he invited her easily, but not enthusiastically.

"I wanted to see you alone for a second," she faltered.

"Didn't hear you, Dory."

"I said I wanted to see you alone for a second—there's something I wanted to ask you."

"Oh, I get you. Well, I'll fix it. Come early, and we'll have time before they get here."

"They?"

"Foulke may bring Mabel. It's too hot to do anything but play bridge."

"Oh, all right."

And she hung up the receiver, feeling cheap and baffled and defeated. She did not play bridge very well. They did not want her in their game.

When late afternoon came, after a restless and irresolute day, she made herself look her prettiest. Her heart's beating was suffocating her now; she was hardly conscious of what she was doing. She locked the door behind her and walked two or three blocks to the omnibus, finding a seat upstairs.

The familiar grimy streets began to move by; they were out beside the slowly flowing hot river; hundreds and

hundreds of persons were sitting in the shade of the big riverside trees. Babies and nurses, even as late as this—solitary men with newspapers. . . .

Lights were not lighted yet. Dory got off the omnibus and walked up to Bruce's apartment and was sent upstairs at once. She thought all the way of what she would say to him. She thought that she would tell him that she couldn't go on like this—the truth must out—she cared too deeply to be put off this way . . . "Be kind to me, Bruce. I've no one but you. . . ."

But when she entered the studio she saw among its dim rich shadows—for here, too, no lamps had yet been lighted—Bruce standing by the window, looking out and smoking, and Perdita stretched comfortably in a big velvet chair, looking deliciously cool in a watery-green diaphanous gown that shimmered in the dusk like lily leaves on a stream.

"Come in," Perdita said. "Oh, it's you, Dory! But where've you been all this week?"

"I've not seen you since Sunday," Bruce reproached her.

Perdita caught at her hand, held her close to her chair.

"You're pretty in white," she said.

"I'm—baking!" Dory said youthfully.

"Not so bad up here, though. And afterward we're going to walk on the roof and get ourselves filthy, and see the lights," Perdita said.

"No, it's not so bad up here."

"But hasn't it been a week?" Bruce said lazily.

"Oh, awful!"

"Well, give an account of yourself, Dory. What have you been doing?"

"Nothing much. How'd your Philadelphia trip go, Bruce?"

"Sunday? All right."

"Hot down there?"

"It must have been baking," Perdita said mildly. Dory felt herself beginning to tremble, deep within.

Impossible to talk to Bruce now. Impossible to say anything—to do anything except struggle through this last terrible evening somehow, and then creep home to the dismantled, desolate flat, and from it slip away to-morrow—away from them all, forever.

"I don't mind this heat," Perdita said. "I've got something of the lizard in me."

"Something of the snake," Bruce suggested.

She merely moved her fine dark eyes to him speculatively. Their glances met, rested for a second, broke again.

"I feel like bridge to-night, a hard, long, vicious session," Perdita announced contentedly.

"I'm rotten," Dory lamented lightly, with an effort for ease.

"It won't matter a bit," the older girl assured her kindly. "We'll be five, when Foulke and Mabel come, and we'll cut in. That's the nicest way, nobody gets too tired. . . ."

Silence and dusk. Bruce flung his cigarette out of the window.

"Go play us a sad sweet tune, Infant," he commanded. Dory drew back into the protecting big leather arm of the couch.

"Bruce, I don't feel like playing——"

"She plays?" Perdita asked, with a curious glance.

"She plays very well."

"I used to work with Mildred, when we first kept house together," Dory explained.

"Well, then, go play," Perdita directed, with a jerk of her head toward the piano.

Despising herself, Dory went slowly to the piano and began on one of the rambling combinations of a dozen airs that Bruce liked. Shadows deepened in the studio; Bruce flung himself into a chair.

Suddenly, to her horror, Dory found herself weeping softly, steadily, with a terrible feeling that there was no end to her tears, that nothing would ever stem them. She gulped and struggled, blinking, straightening her back, trying desperately to think of something—of anything—except how perilously sweet it was to be sitting here in the beloved old studio, playing the memorable old music again.

Presently she put her head down on the keyboard and burst into sobs.

Bruce was at her side in a moment, his arm about her; Perdita snapped a lamp into soft bloom. Dory was half led, half carried into Bruce's bathroom, where she laughed hysterically and bathed her face and cried again and laughed again, and finally ran a wet comb through her honey-coloured hair and regained her composure.

"What on earth struck you, darling?" Mabel, who had come in with Foulke, now asked, horror-stricken.

"Oh, nothing! Just tired—and nerves."

By this time they were back in the studio, and Adachi, Bruce's Jap boy, was serving them jellied soup. Dory sat next to Bruce, who shook her recently recovered self-control dangerously whenever he smiled affectionately down at her and asked her if she were all right.

"Dory, I'll be glad for your sake when this rotten hot weather's over. To-morrow's September, and I thank the Lord! You've always hated it, and it makes you look like a pale little kid."

He took his napkin and touched her long dark lashes carefully.

"They're all sopping!"

"I know. I'm an awful baby."

"There was a feller in the office the other day," Foulke contributed in his lazy voice, "who said that crying was 'white bleeding,' and it's darn good for you."

Perdita laughed. They all talked on idly, in a desultory, wearied fashion, except Dory, who could not speak, and who felt like a spectre at her own funeral feast.

A breeze came in through the high, opened window, and the loose thin curtains stirred; the room was filled with cool shadows; only a tempered light or two, here and there, illumined the group about the long, black oblong of the table.

"Cold chicken, and salad, and large, cold, wet, pallid pickles," Foulke chanted.

"All right now?" Bruce asked Dory, in an undertone.

"Fine," she said resolutely.

After dinner she chose a moment, when nobody was paying any particular attention to her, to step through the big corner window to the narrow balcony that hung over the park, where she could stare down at the tops of the trees, moving restlessly in a warm autumn wind, and at the wheeling beetles with their fiery little eyes that were taxicabs, and at the Broadway lights flaring and fading, flaring and fading again, off toward the southwest.

Her world; her dear, beloved, thrilling, busy world. And at this time to-morrow she would have no place in it.

She remembered Broadway when, as a child dangling on the arm of her mother, she had threaded its theatrical precinct, going from shabby doorway to shabby doorway, looking for just the right opening for Mother.

Mother had been a lean, sweet, eager, idealistic woman, who sang ballads while sentimental coloured pictures of girls under trees, and old farmhouses, and faces looking through brightly pink rose petals were thrown upon the

screen. Mother had had a charming voice, and Dory had been very proud of her. Her father, a newspaper man whose opera reviews were even now remembered in a certain newspaper group, she never had known at all. Donald Garrison had been dead for almost twenty years.

After Mother died, nine years ago now, in a flu epidemic, there had come three hard years for Dory, when her father's sister, the dean of a small woman's college, had undertaken her real education. The girl, at fifteen, had been placed in a boarding school where the deficiencies of her mother's system of schooling had been clearly and cruelly exposed. Except for a sunny disposition and a tendency not to notice snubs, it might have gone badly with Dory, but as it was she drifted through it comfortably and had during this time displayed the talent for acting that was later to decide her career.

Aunt Florence had strongly disapproved of the stage idea on general principles, inherent rather than sincere, and had departed with a troop of girls for an educational summer in England, with much disappointment in her niece.

And Dory had come to New York, eighteen and alone and pretty and wiser than Aunt Florence knew, or even than Dory herself knew, and all the delight of self-expression and hard work and success had followed.

Delicious, delicious days to remember; delicious expedients of gowns and railway fares; breath-taking mornings when one snatched papers to see reviews; enchanted evenings in Bagdad, when one loitered over spaghetti and sour Italian bread, and talked with the Austins and the Jacksons and Sonia and Tony and Terry and Mabel and Jim and Joe.

And then a night in the Austins' studio, and a squarely built, dark young man there, a Rhodes Scholarship man,

who had written a play even while he was in college, and who had the quickest, most brilliant smile. . . .

Bruce Macgowan. She remembered that he had told her that very first night of his wife, such a beautiful young wife, who had been shut away from the world for almost a year now—shut away ever since the arrival of a stillborn son had discovered to her and to him the taint in her blood, and the loss of all their hopes and happiness at a single blow.

She had been wearing the creamy chiffon gown with all the little flowers embroidered about its full skirt—roses and blue-bells and sprays of green and tiny yellow daisies, all tangled in a delicious confusion together on the petal-like frills. She had fixed wide eyes on him, had heard her own, "Oh, but how terrible—how terrible for you!"

And she had known at that instant that the sealed door of love—that door at whose outer side she had so often stood wondering, or laughing, or scornful—was opening—opening—was tempting her to step inside.

That had been almost three years ago. The memory of the long months between now and then fell like so many drops of distilled acid into Dory's heart.

Suddenly Bruce was beside her on the balcony.

"I thought you were playing cards, Bruce?"

"I'm dummy."

Dory's heart beat fast.

"I've been—awfully sad, lately, Bruce."

"My dear little girl"— his tone was all concern—"I'm so sorry!"

Dory's wits seemed suddenly to scatter, she could not think of the next thing to say.

"I'm jealous, I suppose," she faltered.

"You needn't be," Bruce answered quickly.

"I'm so dumb," Dory said humbly.

"You're not dumb at all. You're a little down on your luck, and you hate hot weather," Bruce began in his kindly big-brotherly tone.

A shout from within interrupted him.

"Come on, Bruce! Come on, Dory! You're in."

It was no use. It was no use. She went back to the table and played miserably, blindly. Joe Driscoll had come in and stood behind her.

"Dory, Dory, your spades were all good, you poor sap!"

"Oh, Joe, were they?"

"You cleared them with the greatest care," Bruce told her, "and then let Perdita get in with her diamonds."

Perdita said nothing as she scored four hundred in penalties. Her amused eyes were only kind as they smiled at Dory, but the younger girl felt an impulse toward murder.

"Come on now, come on now, let's get this rubber," Bruce said bracingly. "Let's get this rubber." That was what interested him, she thought, when her own heart was breaking, and she was going away from his fine big strong hands, and his flashing smile, and his heart-reaching voice forever. Or, if not forever, for a long, long while.

"I didn't hear you, Bruce."

"I bid three hearts, Perdita bid three no trump, and I doubled——"

"Yes, I heard that."

"And now Foulke's gone to four spades, and I double——"

"Oh, all right."

"You don't say anything to that?"

"Oh, no. Oh! Is it up to me? Oh, no."

"Dory passes, Foulke passes," said Perdita slowly, anxiously. "Your lead, Dory."

Dory led confusedly, and instantly heard a faint, almost inaudible breath of incredible surprise and relief on the

part of her opponents, that indicated a fatal error on her part. She glanced timidly at Bruce's face; it was stern and dark. He played bridge, as he did everything, with all the force of his own forceful personality.

A sickness of spirit possessed her. She wanted to scream. It was only a game, anyway—what *difference* did it make?

Perdita and Foulke scored a small slam, game, and rubber—a thirteen hundred rubber.

"We were sunk without a bubble if she led the club." Perdita exulted in that ungenerous excitement that follows a hard-won contract.

"Yep, we had to lose five tricks if she led the club to Bruce," Foulke agreed. "She takes the ace, he trumps the next trick, and gets in the second heart, and then—she had only one heart, didn't you, Dory?—she discards, and he leads a third heart and she trumps. By golly, that was a lucky lead for us."

Foulke had to go out to Westchester, he was going to leave now. Jim Driscoll was a magnificent bridge player, obviously panting to cut in. Dory left with Foulke. She was tired, and he had to pass her house anyway.

Bruce went with them, all the courteous host, to the elevator, and quite simply kissed Dory good-night. For a minute her small cold hand clung to his big hard brown one desperately; he was to remember long afterward the pleading, almost frightened look in her blue eyes underneath the soft drift of the honey-coloured hair.

"How about a little dinner, just you and me, some night next week, Dory?" Bruce asked.

She gave him an earnest, penetrating look.

"It would be lovely."

"Oh, by George, I may be in the Adirondacks with the Pierces next week! But the week after that?"

There was no change in her unsmiling, steady glance.

"All right, Bruce."

The elevator door opened for Foulke and herself, they stepped in, the iron clanged again, and they were gone.

Bruce was conscious of a strange, wild impulse to follow her, to get hold of his little Dory, comfort her, make her happy again in her own delicious, grateful, little-girl fashion. He thought of Margaret, his wife. Dory did not know it, nobody knew it, but Margaret was better, was shakily ready to emerge into some sort of domestic experiment again. Margaret's Boston home and her family were the real "Adirondacks" of his apology to Dory. He would see Margaret on Sunday, and on Monday telephone Dory and tell her the whole truth.

The touch of small cold desperate fingers was haunting him as he went back to his game. Margaret Sunday. And on Monday he would get hold of Dory and make everything clear.

CHAPTER IV

ALL through the long seventeen days of the slow sea trip, Porter and another little boy, whose mother had a tiny baby to manage, and who could pay scant attention to the older child, enjoyed what they called "paper skipping" with a zest that amazed Dory Garrison. She made the paper skips every night by bunching a double newspaper into a sort of butterfly tied firmly in the centre with a long string. Day after day she went with the two small boys to the very stern of the ship and sat down in the shade of a little oil house, where the anchors and ropes were neatly stacked, and day after day the two children hung on the high rail and trolled with their paper skips.

They played with them in the early mornings before breakfast, and returned at once to paper skipping afterward. When the days got burning hot Dory made them come up to the deck and rest, but in the late afternoon she had to go down past the B deck, and the C deck, and to the hot, steamy tourist cabins, and buy a new ball of cord from the little shopkeeper, and make paper skips again.

Every morning Porter awakened asking, "Can I play with Byron to-day?" and when Dory answered in the affirmative he added eagerly, "Did joo make us our paper skips?"

He would come across the cabin from his bed to hers, and climb sociably in beside her, a friendly, sturdy, bright-eyed little boy in very cool, loose pa·amas.

"Are you sleepy dis mornin'?"

"Oh, Porter, it isn't six o'clock yet!"

It always seemed a terrible calamity to have to awaken so early, and get up and dress, and get him dressed. Dory would feel vague, hungry, and weary as she went out into the salt-scented loveliness of morning sky and sea. Yet it was the sweetest part of the day, and at eight, when she was drinking her hot coffee, enjoying her breakfast, cutting Porter's toast into long strips and sugaring his oatmeal, she usually felt well pleased with herself.

Byron's harassed father was always glad to surrender him to Dory. The baby kept Byron's parents awake all night long, every night, a fact that meant little to anyone else, and everything to them. While Byron was with the kind Miss Garrison who was in charge of the little Pennoyer boy, Byron's parents and his infant sister were all asleep.

Byron and Porter paid out their respective strings, fifty feet of string apiece, and the newspaper skips floated and dipped above the rushing wake of the steamer. The boys screamed and shouted at intervals; at other times they hung entranced on the rails, watching the careening water, lulled into a sort of stupor by the rapturous combination of movement, colour, air—the horrifying danger of drowning so close to them yet so infinitely far away.

The secure, clean, firm deck, the brass rail, the towering masts dipped and rose, dipped and rose and rolled on serenely; death was within three feet of these confident scraps of babyhood in the cool little linen shirts and trousers; death could come no nearer.

Dory sat watching them, numb, dazed, and vaguely dreaming. Her thoughts fluttered, sank, flew as idly as did the skips themselves. For days her heart had a fashion of beating violently; after a while that stopped, and she felt merely heavy and dull.

Twenty-four hours after the sailing from New York had

assured her that she really had escaped from all the old associations and environments, panic seized her, the terror that she would never mean anything again to Mabel and Bruce and Terry shook her like a fever and chill.

She spent the second evening on board writing Bruce an eloquent little letter, telling him just what she was doing, where she would be. She felt that she had been away for months; that they would retain but faint unimportant memories of her . . .

The letter was mailed in the fascinating Spanish streets of Havana. Porter's father, crushed and silent, making a painful and visible effort, met Dory and Porter, there, at the dock, and kissed a little boy who was agitatedly asking Dory, over the paternal shoulder, if he and Byron could sail their skips to-morrow, then?

Porter Pennoyer senior took Dory and Porter to his hotel and they had sliced cold sugared pineapple to bite from little sticks, and tiny bananas, and iced coffee, while they sat on a shady porch that simmered with heat. He said he would drive them to the country club, if Miss Garrison would care to see it, but Dory decided that it was too hot.

Porter junior was wrapped in anxious concern lest they should miss the ship that evening; Dory had her own absorbing thoughts and hardly knew what she did or said. Porter senior gathered from her what he could of his loving, gentle young wife's sudden death, and escorted them back to their hot little stateroom at eight o'clock trying to feel glad that the girl was so gentle with his baby son, and that he adored her.

"You've not met my sister, Miss Garrison?"

"Your sister?"

"Mrs. Penfield? The aunt to whom the baby's going?"

"No. But her letters are lovely."

"She's a lovely person. Betty"— he spoke of his wife— "Betty would wish it to be this way. But I wish I could keep the little fellow down here with me."

"It's lucky, while he's so little, that his aunt wants him so," Dory offered mildly.

"That's what I keep telling myself. It's a big family and a lovely home. My sister—Mary—has five children of her own."

"But older than little Port?"

"Oh, yes, almost grown. You love Miss Garrison, don't you, sonny?" the older Porter said, for the baby was now jamming wet kisses against Dory's mouth, and scrambling upward toward her lap.

Seated on the side of her bed, she dragged him into her arms.

"I'll give him a sponge bath and settle him off," she promised the father.

"Does he go off to sleep pretty well?"

"Oh, beautifully! I never leave him until he's sound, do I, Port? And even then," Dory said, hungering for sympathy, "I just go to the rail outside the cabin, and look—northward, toward New York. All my friends are there, and it's lonely, leaving them, even though I expect to go back."

The man was not listening.

"We planned it so differently," he said. "Betty was coming down on this very ship; I had found a little apartment for her. She loved Havana."

"Did joo get the string for our skips?" little Porter demanded, digging an affectionate little chin against her.

"I'll get it, darling."

"You feel that nothing can make it up to them. My sister's a wonderful woman, but of course a child's mother is his mother."

"Come on, Port, we'll walk out to the gangplank with Daddy."

"Is that gong the visitors' gong?"

"It must be, if my watch is right."

The man shouldered his son.

"Kiss Dad, old man. I don't know when I'll see you again!"

"I kissed joo on jore nose," said little Porter, who was in a silly mood.

"See the big ship going out, Port," said Dory.

"Yep. That's going up to New York."

Her heart staggered, seemed to turn liquid. Her strength failed her. Perhaps the crowd was going down to Coney this hot night. . . .

"God, I hate to leave Betty's baby!"

Dory roused at last, brought from her own sorrow to his by his tone.

"He's *really* happy," she offered.

"*Is*, eh?" he asked eagerly.

"Oh, yes, he's in a gale most of the time. I never knew a sweeter little boy. Everyone likes him," she said generously, gathering momentum as she went along.

"I'm very glad to hear that," the father said. "I'm so glad you told me that. He's happy, eh?"

"Oh, yes. He's only a little boy. And perhaps when he's a little older——"

She wished she had roused sooner, appreciated the tragedy of the situation sooner, when she saw the man burst suddenly into tears and turn hurriedly toward the gangplank without a backward look.

"Why didn't I talk to him about his wife, why didn't I let him talk?" she asked herself remorsefully as she prepared the weary Porter for bed. "I wonder—I wonder if she meant to him what Bruce means to me?"

The lights of the tropical port faded away into velvety blackness; the stars came out again; the big steamer rolled and dipped and breathed audibly, moving upon her way. To Dory, alone at the dark rail, there came the faint cadences of the orchestra; some very young and courageous persons were dancing.

She thought of her letter, speeding already to Bruce—perhaps on that very ship that had sailed to-night—and laughed contemptuously to herself.

"You poor simpleton, nearly breaking your neck to get away, and then weakening like that! He won't be in much doubt as to what you think of him."

But no matter, it was warmly soothing, heartening, to be weak with Bruce, to run to shelter like a little coward, freely to confess to him that one couldn't manage it alone. No, she had had enough of *that*, sailing all alone, almost mad with the frenzy of pain and indecision in her heart. It had seemed to Dory, as the big ship dragged free of New York, that the flung cables and severed gangplanks were so many cuts and slashes in her own living heart.

The letter—the cowardly, weak, impulsive letter—had cured her heartache, anyway. She could sleep to-night, instead of writhing about on her hot bed like a little heretic at the stake.

"Poor man, he must miss his wife! He spoke as if they'd watched every instant of Porter's life together. Kept talking about the baby's teething, and his first Christmas. . . .

"I suppose he thought that by this time they'd all be together, he and she and little Porter. . . .

"Bruce. What is he doing to-night? Maybe Perdita's having supper with him in the studio, and afterward they'll go up on the roof and look at the stars. Maybe it's raining. The studio, with the hot rain booming down, and the thunder roaring, and the curtains blowing about. . . .

"I'll know soon, anyway. There'll be a letter for me in California. Or maybe he'll meet me there. He could do it. He could do it easily! He might easily be on the dock when we reach San Francisco. . . ."

The hot, dreamy days went by, and the paper skips flew and whistled over churning, interlacing white water. Dory and Porter lived on iced tea and pineapple and cookies. Dory thought that there might be a message from Bruce at Panama, but there was no message whatsoever except a cable from Porter senior to Porter junior:

Thinking about my boy love from Dad.

Three days out of San Francisco everything turned suddenly cold and gray, and the wind whistled, and the sea was rougher. From lying languidly on their beds from one to five o'clock and wearily calling for ginger ale, the passengers began to button on reefers and walk the deck in true ocean fashion.

San Diego, rising on brown hills, tree smothered, framed in long lines of lazy white surf, was dreamy and hot again. Los Angeles was sticky and also hot, and Porter got a heavy cold there. Activity, friendliness, expectation stirred on all sides; Dory told herself passively that they would be in San Francisco to-morrow—not that it mattered.

It was all very different from her expectations. The great city she had left behind her had been so enervatingly hot, and the trip so hot—brasses and deck hot to the touch, the dining room insufferable, and the staterooms mere cubicles of burning still air—that it was amazing to find San Francisco cool and gray, wrapped in pure clean fog. It was amazing to put on her coat again, and belt it gratefully about her.

The ship moved slowly by the forts, and through the Golden Gate, and along a vaguely outlined waterfront, beyond and above which, through rifts, she could see the rising shoulders of hills, and the massed cubes of houses piled up on top of one another. Fog horns were sounding busily, and the plaintive bleating of ships' horns came in from all sides.

But even as they docked, the fog lifted and a hundred flashing colours came out in strengthening sunshine. Dory went from rail to rail, enraptured by the circular panorama of islands, mountains, and water, with the sun driving the mist like a faint vapour higher and higher into the air, and gulls wheeling and curving all along the piers, uttering their thin high cries, dipping and floating.

Sausalito came into view, a toy village of red roofs peeping between plumy tree tops, with the mirror of the bay ending every steep little street. Mount Tamalpais closed the landscape toward the north with a sweeping line infinitely majestic and severe. Ferryboats left long wakes of white foam as they moved to and fro between the varied shores; freighters ploughed by, on their way to the Golden Gate; tugs snorted and ducked amid the morning traffic of the busy harbour.

A handsome, squarely built woman with a tall smiling boy accompanying her was suddenly beside Dory; a pleasant, brisk, authoritative woman, not fashionable at all, but handsomely dressed, and entirely sure of herself.

"Miss Garrison? We've been looking for you everywhere!"

"Is it Mrs. Penfield?"

"Yes," said the other expectantly, even a trifle impatiently. "Where's the child?"

"I just wanted to explain——" Dory began.

"Explain? Good gracious, is anything the matter?"

Dory sent a cautious glance about.

"No, not exactly," she began hesitatingly.

"Not exactly! But where is he? You alarm me!" said the lady roundly.

"I didn't—" Dory looked at the boy for sympathy, and received it—"I didn't want particularly to call attention to him," she explained. "He's not—very well."

"Not very well! You saw the ship's doctor, of course? You didn't say anything in your wire——"

"I was afraid the whole ship might be quarantined for what may be nothing but an upset stomach," explained Dory, made nervous by her manner.

"But what did the *doctor* say?"

"I didn't ask him. I was afraid the whole ship might be quarantined for what is probably——"

"You didn't see the doctor! Where is he? Is the child in bed? I must see the doctor at once," Mrs. Penfield was beginning anxiously and sharply, when the seventeen-year-old boy grinningly interposed and laid a restraining hand on her arm.

"Mother, don't you get it? Miss —— She knows they'll hold the kid, and maybe the whole ship, for weeks, if they get onto it."

Mrs. Penfield, whose impetuosity was moving her to quick steps in this direction and that, and anxious glances everywhere, halted, irresolute, a sudden light dawning in her eyes.

"Oh—— Oh, I see," she said, in a tone that fell rapidly to one of appreciation and conspiracy. "Oh, I *see*."

"Well, Mother——" the boy said patiently, good-naturedly.

"Oh, I see. And you think he might have—— I see." She glanced about with a caution that far surpassed Dory's

own. "Where is he, my dear?" she asked, in the kindest tone Dory had yet heard from her.

"He's right here in his deck chair. He appears to have a little fever," Dory said. "But I could dress him, and we walked right through medical inspection, and it seemed so much wiser to get him ashore, and into his own bed. I warned the father of the child he's been playing with——"

"Oh, my dear, my dear, you are quite right!" Mrs. Penfield said fervently. "We'll get him right ashore. We'll not even wait for the trunks. You wait for the trunks, Thurston, and I'll send Stringy back for you. My daughter's waiting on the dock," she said, hurrying along with Dory toward the deck chair where little Porter, somewhat heavy and languid to the experienced eye, but dressed and ready to disembark, was waiting, half asleep.

"Ah, yes, I see. Well, it's probably nothing but tummy!" Mrs. Penfield said, kneeling down beside the chair, putting her arms about him. "My darling, darling baby," Dory heard her breathe, and she was not surprised to see that the older woman's eyes were filled with tears as she rose. "Don't kiss him, Thurston," she said to her son, who, to Dory's surprise, was actually leaning over the little fellow. "But carry him right to the dock, and he can walk to the car. Well, you're waking up, sweetheart," she went on, to the child. He roused, alarmed, asked for Dory, smiled at her, and sank back into a doze.

"He's fond of you," Mrs. Penfield observed, approving.

Between the two women he walked on his own feet along the splintery pier, between bales and crates, shouting men, and banging trunks. A car was parked just outside the dock railing, with a pretty girl reading in it. This was Rhoda Penfield; she looked with sympathy and interest at little Porter, looked with mild surprise at her sternly executive mother.

"Get in, Miss Garrison, and take him in your lap. He wants to be with you," Mrs. Penfield said anxiously and quickly.

"What's the matter with him, Mother?"

"He has a heavy cold," Mrs. Penfield said firmly.

"He's cute," Rhoda said, twisted about on the front seat, studying him speculatively. She raised pleasant brown eyes to Dory's with a smile. They liked each other. "Miss Garrison's coming down to the house, Mother?" she asked, in a cheerful, idle tone that contrasted strangely with her mother's agitated manner.

"Rhoda, do for Heaven's sake stop talking nonsense!" Mrs. Penfield said sharply. "This child has got something, and every minute you waste here chattering may be vital. I've got to have Ballard see him. Of *course* Miss Garrison is coming home with us; she's the only person the poor child knows at all—and if he's to be ill—among absolute strangers—as if he hasn't had *enough*, in the last few weeks——"

"Mother, darling, hire a hall," said Miss Penfield, unruffled. "What about Thurston?"

"Thurston's seeing to Miss Garrison's and the child's trunks. I'm going to send Stringy in for them with the truck.—Yes, darling, it's Aunt Mary," Mrs. Penfield said tenderly to Porter, bending to smile over him.

"Dory——?" he asked uneasily.

"Your Dory's right here, darling."

"Cute name," commented Rhoda. "What's he got?" she asked in an undertone, with a significant look into Dory's face.

"I don't know. Measles, maybe."

"Didn't the ship's doctor know?" Rhoda asked.

"If we had consulted the ship's doctor," Mrs. Penfield said, with her own prompt, capable air of common sense,

"he'd've been on board for days—maybe weeks. It's nothing, probably, but excitement and a cold and change of climate——"

"And a touch of leprosy and typhus," Rhoda added drily. "I thought that was against the law," she suggested.

"Is it?" Dory exclaimed.

"Smuggling a contagious disease off a vessel?"

"But I didn't know he had anything contagious," Dory said, distressed.

At this Rhoda narrowed her eyes and laughed.

"I can see you're deep, Miss Garrison," she said simply.

"Rhoda, dear, *will* you stop talking, and get us home?"

"Gladly, Mother dear, but hasn't Miss Garrison any luggage, and what about Thurston—I mean, I get no personal pleasure sitting here on this broiling waterfront smelling bilge water——" Rhoda was beginning with deadly eloquence, when a patient, really anxious look from her mother quenched her like a shower of rain, and turning about briskly she began to drive.

"What about my slippers?" she called, over her shoulder.

"Your slippers! This child is in a fever and you——"

"Oh, all right, all right!" Rhoda said hastily, driving on.

"You can wear your blue dress and Mary's silver slippers," the mother presently suggested.

"Or I can turn the dance into a fancy-dress and go as a Neapolitan flower girl!" Miss Penfield countered without resentment.

"My daughter Mary, Mrs. Jay, is not dancing just at present," Mrs. Penfield said to Dory. She glanced down at Porter, elevated her eyebrows significantly. "Great expectations—any minute now," she said, with quiet pride. "That's why I didn't come East to get this darling child,"

she added in explanation. "My daughter Mary's baby will be our first grandchild—you can imagine what it means to all of us."

"Is—this daughter the eldest?"

"No. Jerd's older," said Mrs. Penfield. "And my son Tom was older," she added. "Tom was—taken from us, eight years ago," she went on, with a deep wrenching sigh.

"Then Thurston, that you saw at the boat, he's a peach, then Sterling, who's fourteen, and smart, isn't he, Mother? —and then Julia," Rhoda supplied rapidly, over her shoulder. "And now this poor little kid, and Mary's baby," she added.

In those few sentences Dory learned something that was true and characteristic of all the Penfields: their devotion to one another, and especially to the brother they had lost, and their general affection for all children, a sort of taking childhood for granted, understanding it, liking it.

They were threading the cluttered traffic of the Embarcadero now, working their way through trucks and taxicabs, gonging street cars and lines of persons hurrying to or sauntering away from the ferry. Factory whistles sounded noon, barges and ferry steamers echoed them from the bay, gulls piped and wheeled overhead. Warehouses gave out odours of roasting coffee and searing rubber; the pavement smelled pleasantly of tar.

They went past docks where enormous ships were drawn up closely, their cranes rising high above the roofs, went on through the factory streets of the south city, asleep now in the noontime rest, and were immediately out in the country—a country of small Spanish houses and carefully tended little gardens and long lines of towering eucalyptus trees whose sickles hung yellow and brown and whose trunks were peeling in long strips of bark.

The open fields looked strangely burned and dry to Dory, as did the whirling water sprinklers in the gardens and on the lawns; the drowsy air was sweet with the scent of brush fires and a thousand delicious hot flower odours. Dory liked it all; her heart was singing. Mrs. Penfield had volunteered the information that there was mail for her; two letters. Two letters! Dory could wait for them; there was no hurry. Nothing in the world could keep her from Bruce's letter, and whatever it said would fall like manna into her starving heart.

"I was noticing the flowers," she said. The handsomest mansion and the tiniest home were alike buried in them. She recognized petunias as soft and bright as crêpe, pale cosmos and ruffled hollyhocks deeply pink, blue delphiniums, and metal, blazing zinnias, late roses climbing everywhere, and white and yellow daisies mingling with blue cornflowers and sturdy marigolds. Close against doorways and under windows hydrangea blossomed in clean great pompoms of pink and blue, drifts of wild Michaelmas daisies were blown like blue smoke across all the open spaces.

"I've never seen so many flowers. What's the purply one with the dark leaves up against that white garage?"

"That's heliotrope. It isn't so pretty as the others, but it has the sweetest smell of them all."

"And the fountainy tree with the red tassels?"

"Ah, that's a pepper. That pungent smell we get now and then is pepper. Isn't it delicious? And there, those are a variety of young eucalyptus trees—with the white blossoms, they're as pretty as flowers, I think," Mrs. Penfield said. "You don't have *those* in the East."

"Smell that? That's tarweed—that's a smell I love," said Rhoda, turning about. "We always get it here near San Carlos. I mean it sounds dreadful, in a way," Rhoda

added, driving as she talked, "but after all, it's a country-ish sort of smell."

"Oh, mountains!" breathed Dory.

"Those down there are the Santa Cruz Range, and over there, toward the east, is the Coast Range," Mrs. Penfield explained. "We're right between the mountains."

"Oh, mountains!" Dory said again, feasting her eyes upon their far-away, solemn blue outlines, rising vast and soft and almost transparent against a hot, colourless sky. "You can look through them," she said.

"Wait until sunset—you'll go mad," Rhoda predicted, turning again. "If all that child's got is an upset tummy," she added darkly, with a glance at Porter, "I'm the rose of no man's land."

"He's heavy in your arms, my dear?"

"No, no—I don't mind a bit."

"Children often get upset travelling," Mrs. Penfield said, studying Porter's unconscious little face concernedly. "You darling baby!" she said. "Rhoda," she added, in her characteristic tone of capability and energy, "we'll have to put the boys and Julia down in the Cottage. If it *is* anything catching——"

"I was thinking," Rhoda began, in a pause, "that it might be better——"

"Rhoda, please don't dispute me on this, dear. If Julia should come down with something just now when Mary's baby may come any minute—and when Thurston is trying his best to make up his credits——"

"Mother, dearest, I was only going to say——"

"My dear, I *well* remember when you and Mary and Tom and Jerd had whooping-cough, and I certainly am not anxious——"

"But why not put Kate and little Porter here in the Cottage?" Rhoda shot in swiftly.

"Oh, I see," Mrs. Penfield said, a little dashed. "You mean—yes, I see. Not take him into the big house at all—I see. Well, yes, that would be the best way, certainly. I see."

"This is Menlo Park, Miss Garrison."

"Oh? And is it near Palo Alto?"

"They're neighbours—they run into each other. The college is off that way, we're up behind it," said Rhoda, with a jerk of her head toward the west. "I'll take you 'round there to-morrow."

The car went through high brick gateposts smothered in vines, and followed a winding road edged with brilliant banks of flowers, shaded by giant oaks, and passing between stretches of level lawns across which Dory got glimpses of orchard trees and white fences, distant white barns and stables built in a more spacious day, and finally of a square, broad, three-storied mansion, with its brick walls painted a mellow white and traced with the fingers of flowering vines. "We're there!" said Rhoda.

MRS. PENFIELD descended briskly from the car at the foot of the spreading, fat-banistered steps, but Rhoda, with a nod to Dory, drove on, through more patches of shade and vistas of lawn, and stopped before a small, one-storied building that was like a miniature of the other.

"This used to be my grandfather's surgery," explained Rhoda, "but we use it for a guest house. I'll help you get him into bed."

"And we might telephone for a doctor?"

"Oh, Mother's doing that; Mother's doing everything," said Rhoda easily. And again Dory was struck, this time with the tenderness and expertness with which the young girl helped to undress the little boy.

That Mother was doing everything appeared probable, for almost immediately a small girl addressed as "Julia" appeared at a safe distance from the doorway of the cottage and shouted, "Mother says you're to take a hot bath before you come up to the house, Rhody, and leave these things on the porch until you are ready to step into them."

"I suppose I'm to come out to the porch as is, with nothing on?" Rhoda riposted in her own characteristically crisp yet amiable manner, from the bathroom window.

A fine-looking, middle-aged maid came down with hot-water bottles and small toilet articles—soap, washcloths, and extra pillows.

"I'm to stay here to-night, anyway, Miss Rhoda, and you're please to get out," she said, with authority. "Well, the dear little fellow," she added, looking at Porter, whose

one need appeared to be sleep. "He's had a hard run of luck for a child, hasn't he?"

Julia had vanished and Rhoda was wandering about half dressed while the bath water ran. The interior of the four-room cottage was airy and charmingly inviting; the beds were fat and white, the woodwork white, there were books in white bookcases, and in the white-tiled old-fashioned fireplace logs were laid in readiness.

Now a fourteen-year-old boy was suddenly in the open doorway.

"Get out of here, Sterling," the maid said.

"Lissen," the boy said, "we don't know what he's got until the doctor sees him, do we? Lissen, Kate——"

"Get out!" repeated Kate. "One sick child is enough for any family."

"Lissen," said Sterling. "Mother says the doctor's on his way, and he's bringing a nurse, and does Miss —— Miss——"

"Garrison," Dory supplied.

"—want some lunch right away, or will she wait until one?" Sterling went on as if uninterrupted. "It's half-past twelve."

"I'm nineteen," said Rhoda, appearing in the bathroom door in a trailing wrapper originally intended for a man. "You don't get kid diseases when you're not a kid. I mean, suppose he has some loathsome disease, it doesn't follow that all the grown-ups in the family will get it, because I mean look at doctors and nurses, so where are you?"

"I'm here, and your mama says you're to get out of here, and out you get," said Kate, with simple eloquence.

"Well, what about Miss Garrison, is she going to be inundated or whatever you call it?" Rhoda demanded, with an air of righteousness. "Why should she get bubonic

plague—that's what it is, probably, everyone gets it in Panama, I mean you practically can depend on getting it——"

"You cannot, you sap," the boy named Sterling interrupted, without rudeness. "Panama's one of the healthiest places in the world, and often people get sent there for their health. Goethals——"

"I've been exposed to whatever he's got, and your mother thinks I'd better stay here until the doctor comes, anyway," said Dory.

"Well, I call that a gyp! I was going to take you 'round this afternoon and everything," Rhoda said, really aggrieved.

The kindliness of it warmed Dory's heart, and she smiled, and the two girls knew that they liked each other.

Sterling was lingering on the porch.

"Beat it, Sterling," said his sister. "I can't step from this wrapper into my underwear with you goggling all over the place—I mean that there *are* limits."

"There at the end of the porch—behind them roses," suggested Kate.

"Kate, doesn't he get any lunch?"

"No, he gets nothing until the doctor sees him."

"Gee, what a gyp!" said Sterling.

"You get *your* lunch, and get back to school," directed Kate.

Mrs. Penfield, arriving at this moment, seconded the other, and also managed to hurry up Rhoda's leisurely dressing.

"Dory!" little Porter shouted, rousing.

"I'm right here, darling."

"Dory," he whispered, hostile eyes on the watching women, "where are we?"

"We've left the ship, dear. We're down at Aunt Mary's house."

"You won't go away from me, Dory?"

"No, darling." Dory's look moved to Mrs. Penfield's face, and she saw the other's eyes glisten.

"It would kill my brother if anything happened to *him*," breathed the older woman.

The doctor arrived, sharply suspicious that the whole proceeding was irregular.

"Did the ship's doctor see this child?"

"No, I didn't call him."

"Why not?" Dr. Ballard asked quickly. "Didn't you know that this might be serious?"

"Not yesterday. And to-day it—" Dory looked mildly at Mrs. Penfield—"it seemed wiser to get him—home," she explained.

"How'd you pass medical inspection?"

"We just—walked by."

"They didn't notice anything wrong with the child?"

"No."

"And if they had——?"

"Well, then I suppose the whole ship might have been quarantined," Dory admitted simply.

"Is it scarlet?" Mrs. Penfield asked.

"I think so. A light case—he'll not be any worse than this. But upon my word, nurse," Dr. Ballard said, looking at Dory over his spectacles with a mixture of doubt and admiration in his eyes, "you took a good deal of responsibility upon yourself."

"We had to," Mrs. Penfield announced, in her confident, capable voice. "The place for this child was his Aunt Mary's house, and his own little bed!—Oh, and my dear, your letters!" she said to Dory, producing them. "I forgot them."

In the excitement and confusion of arrival Dory herself had forgotten them. She took the two envelopes with an almost painful rush of blood to her heart. And immediately an utter sickness of soul seized her, and her spine felt cold and weak. Neither letter was from Bruce.

Neither letter was from Bruce! One was from Mildred Bence Morbein in a German pension, and the other from Mabel Cutler.

Mabel knew where she was; Bruce must have told her. But he himself had not written.

Dory went into the room assigned her and took off her hat and washed her face and hands. She could not think. Soul and body seemed to be stunned and reeling from the blow.

The great adventure was over and had turned into a farce. Her dramatic secret departure from New York, her agonies of homesickness, the weakness that had led her to write Bruce—all wasted. It meant nothing to him that she had gone away; it would mean nothing to him that she came back, or didn't come back.

"Oh, I hate him—I *hate* him!" she said, into her towel. The tears came, and she sponged them away. She stood at the basin, drinking cool water, gulping, staring blindly about the room. "I am done with him forever; I'll not weaken again," she whispered.

But she could not shake it off. The sense of shock, the deadly weight at her heart, persisted. Dory felt herself trembling; her thoughts went back to the fever of joyous expectation that had possessed them only an hour ago, and the utter loneliness of this moment, the desolation of this strange place and this bitter disappointment, prostrated her.

After a while she went out, to find that a lunch tray had been sent over—or rather two lunch trays, for herself and

Kate. They were waiting on the porch table at the back of the cottage, where a green little lane led to the tree-shaded street. Dory, apathetic and bewildered, glanced interrogatively at Kate, and they sat down together. From that moment Kate enshrined her in her heart, one of her own people, but Dory neither suspected it nor would have cared much at the time if she had. To her the meal was of ashes, plaster-of-Paris, and chalk, and Kate's voice merely a painful interruption to more painful thoughts.

"They seem to take the care of a sick little boy pretty lightly," she said after a while, to say something.

Kate, who had been graphically describing the earthquake, looked surprised.

"Oh, they're used to children," she said, changing the topic readily. "Nothing that children does ever worries her much. She's the salt, if ever a woman was—Mrs. Penfield. And she thought the world and all of poor Mrs. Pennoyer, that was married to her brother," said Kate.

"Have I seen them all? No, I don't think so," Dory said presently, in answer to a question. "There was Thurston, the boy who met us at the boat, and Rhoda—I know her——"

"She's one that could talk the legs off an iron pot," Kate observed, pouring cream into her tea. "What with everything being 'absolute' and 'pernicious' you'd never know what she meant! But you don't know Miss Mary—that's married to Dr. Edward Jay. We're expecting news of her any time now."

Dory listened respectfully, but she felt as if her head had had a stunning blow. No letter from Bruce!

"Sterling you've seen, and Julia—she's a heart-scald," Kate went on. "That's all, except Jerd, of course."

"A littler one?"

"Oh, no, Jerd's the oldest of them all—he's Judge Pen-

field's child by his first marriage," the woman announced. "His mother died the day he was born—I remember it as if it was yesterday," she said. "It was before I was widowed myself. I was supposed to be the baby's nurse, but until he come I was helping in the kitchen while they had sickness in the house. The Judge—he wasn't a judge then—come out into the upper hall and put the child into my arms. 'Here,' he says, 'take him somewhere and keep him quiet,' he says. 'For she's very ill.' She died that day——"

The woman's eyes blinked as she finished; she looked through the film of tears at the greenery and shadiness of the lane.

"Oh, yes, he's my boy," she ended.

Bruce had evidently told Mabel where Dory was. He had not written.

"Then there was Tom; he was the pick of this family," Kate added, after a silence. "He was a beautiful child, the age Thurston is now. That's one reason the mother is a little partial to Thurston. He's just like Tom.

"He was drowned, eight years ago this very month," she said, as Dory did not speak. "Tom was drowned. They'll never get over it, any one of them. Jerd was overseas fighting the war, and Tom was the oldest boy at home. . . ."

"I will get over this, the stunned feeling," thought Dory. "People always do."

"Is something on your mind?" Kate asked kindly.

"Oh, yes. Well—in a way. There was somebody I expected would write—and he didn't. It was—business, in a way," floundered Dory.

"There was a couple of letters for you."

"Yes, I know. I have them," Dory said.

"And wasn't there no news of your business in them?"

"Yes—that is, there may be. I haven't read them," the girl confessed.

"If it's like that," Kate said in her soul, "it's the oldest business there is, and we've plenty of that in the house already."

And after a shrewd study of Dory's sad little face she began to tell her about Miss Mary's affair with Dr. Jay, and how her father had been "fit to be tied," and also that Miss Rhoda was goin' with Alan Perley, and that Judge Penfield was none too pleased.

Dory experienced a faint emotion of interest in the love affairs; afterward she tried to remember what Kate had said of Mr. Jerd, the older son, but it escaped her.

She had a leisurely bath, straightened out her suitcase, dressed herself freshly, wandered about the cottage looking at magazines and the backs of books. Porter slept, and Kate busied herself with domestic arrangements—towels, sheets, soap, the nurse's bed.

"Did you tell me that the oldest son—Jerd Penfield, is sick, Kate?"

"Only his leg, like I told you," Kate answered, instantly interested.

"Was it—did you tell me?—shot?"

Long, long afterward she remembered herself asking Kate questions about Jerd Penfield on that first green, fragrant, summer afternoon.

"No, it got infected. They don't know what's the matter with it," Kate said. "They're building him up now for another operation."

"Another!"

"You have to keep at them things," Kate said unwillingly.

"They've operated already?"

"Oh, my, yes! They operated in the hospital right back of the lines, and then again about a year afterward. And then it was all right for a while, and he went to Alaska—

he's an electrical engineer," Kate explained. "And then it come back on him. So he come home in June, and I guess they'll operate next month."

"And does he suffer?"

"He does that."

"Can he walk?"

"Oh, sure he walks. But the war had a terrible effect on his mind." Kate, who was attaching a floor plug to a bedside lamp, sat back on her knees and looked up at Dory seriously. "Between the pain in his hip and the way he worries about what he remembers," she said significantly.

"Melancholia," Dory said. She visualized Jerd Penfield as dark and stern, embittered, silent—poor fellow. . . .

"He's not married?" she asked thoughtfully.

"No, he was going to be. She was visiting here when we went into the war, and he went off to the East to offer himself," Kate said. "She married while he was gone. She never was much, if you ask me, but it was nice to see them running around here like two deer—they were very young. He'd always a great attraction for the girls—he has to this day."

"And this operation next month will cure him?"

"A feller's coming from Baltimore to help," Kate said non-committally.

"Does he think it will?"

"I don't know. Anyway, they're going to have it," Kate stated, her tone disclaiming sympathy. She went out of the room.

In the cool of the afternoon Dory went out and walked about among the flower beds. The Penfield house stood on its own square block of ground, sleepy streets lined and roofed with enormous trees surrounded it on three sides; on the fourth side, toward the west, it rose into a stretch of barn and stable land, orchard and vegetable gardens,

sheds, fences, and paddocks, all whitewashed and shining in the afternoon sunlight.

Apples were hidden among the dusty blue-green leaves of the trees; pumpkins were ripening on the ground. An old Chinese, in blue coolie jeans, sitting in the doorway of a tiny cabin up among the barns, nodded amiably to Dory. There were horses in a field; Alderneys loitered by the doorway of a long shed; a big woolly Airedale rose from the stable floor and joined Dory on her tour of inspection.

Beauty, order, a pleasant sort of ripeness, simpleness, and agedness everywhere. Hoses were flinging long sprays of water over the lawns and flower beds, the air was sweet with scent. Sunset light, streaming down through lofty green branches, turned all the upper air to fairyland, a fairyland of reddened trunks, mellow vistas crossed and draped by ropes of creepers translucent in the bright rays and accented by the rich green shadows of the impenetrable foliage.

A gracious dapple of rosy dying sunlight and blots of shade lay on the soft creamy bricks of the square old house; bees were busy in the garden; voices and laughter sounded through the open windows, and from the kitchen came the good scent of baking bread. A mammoth fig tree, towering high over all the other trees, dropped a rich black fruit at Dory's feet. She picked it up and tasted it cautiously.

"It's good," she said aloud.

Bushes near her were loaded thick with gooseberries, and on an old whitewashed arbour the grapes hung thick, black Isabellas, and heavy, hard, pink malagas, and the delicious green-yellow muscats already studded with dried raisins amidst the fresh wet globes.

At the end of the arbour a stout, square, gray-moustached man was standing. He was bareheaded, his bald crown

fringed with silver. Under his arm he held several books wrapped in a newspaper. The Airedale leaped to him with cries of welcome. He looked at Dory.

"Exploring, eh?" he asked.

"It's a wonderful place to explore," said Dory.

"It's a nice place," he agreed without moving his smiling gaze from her face. "You're Miss Garrison?"

Dory nodded.

"And are they treating you pretty well over at the Cottage?"

"Oh, too well. Only I'm sorry to have brought little Porter here sick."

"He'll get over it, he'll get over it," Judge Penfield said unalarmedly. "Going to keep you a prisoner here, are they?"

"For a while. You see, I've been pretty well exposed."

"That's hard on a young girl like you," the Judge mused aloud.

"I don't mind it at all," said Dory. "I've been in New York for three years."

"Oh, that's bad—that's bad," he said, shaking his head. "You know that climate in summer?"

"No, I don't. I don't, my dear. My son was there in war year. You've not met my son Jerd?"

"Not yet."

"He's having a rather sad time of it," the Judge said. He changed the subject resolutely. "Evening newspaper for you, and some books," he said, indicating them. "How's the little feller to-night?"

"Drowsy. Perfectly comfortable, except when his throat bothers him. Miss Budd says that the worst is over. It has to run its course, you know."

"I dare say—" began the old man, with his head on one

side—"I dare say he was quite a care to you on that long trip?"

"He was very good," Dory said, a little at a loss.

"Likable child, eh?" he asked wistfully and hopefully.

"Oh, likable!" She scorned the word. "He's a perfect darling!" she said, standing a few feet away from the Judge with her earnest face almost indignant in the mellow sunset light, and an aureole of honey-coloured hair framing her head.

"You liked him, eh?" he said, in great satisfaction. "Well, that's nice. That's a nice thing to hear. I'm delighted to hear that. I didn't know—children can be troublesome sometimes. But he was a good little feller, and you liked him?"

"You'd *have* to like him."

"But one doesn't always expect—a young girl like you," said the Judge, more delighted every minute.

"He was cute," Dory smiled, very cute herself, in the dappling of green tree shadows, with the smile that was a little too big for her face brightening it, and her little figure outlined against brilliant border flowers.

"Pennoyer is a fine fellow. Mrs. Penfield's brother," explained the Judge.

"He seems utterly heartbroken," Dory said, wishing that she had been a little kinder to him.

"Ah, poor fellow! It was a shocking thing. She telephoned here immediately after the accident, you know," the man said.

"She?"

"Yes, the child's mother. We got the call at about midnight, here. My wife said that her voice was as clear as if she'd been in the next room. Yes—remarkable thing," the Judge went on mildly.

"You mean the night she died she telephoned from New York—three thousand miles!" Dory exclaimed rather than asked.

"Mrs. Penfield said her voice was absolutely natural. She knew she was going, poor child, and she said, 'Mary, will you take my boy?'" the man continued cheerfully, but suddenly obliged to clear his throat.

Dory, who was walking beside him, stopped short, facing him.

"And what did Mrs. Penfield say?" she whispered.

"She said, 'Betty, I'll spoil him. He will be the most tenderly loved baby in the world.'" The Judge was quite frankly wet-eyed now although he was still smiling, and Dory's own eyes glistened as she smiled back.

"I think that is the loveliest thing I ever heard!" she said.

"Yes, yes," the old man mused, putting away his handkerchief. "We feel it to be a trust. Well, have a good night's rest," he said at the Cottage door, "and we'll try to make it up a little when they let you out. Don't fail to call on one of the boys if you need something."

Dory took the books and newspaper and bade him an affectionate good-night, even adding, "you old darling, you!" to it in her heart. The shadow settled down upon her immediately upon entering the house, but the glowing, fragrant hour of sunset had mitigated even that.

"That's the cutest little girl I've seen for a long while," the Judge said at the supper table.

"There's something absolutely intriguing about the way those big teeth come out in a smile and twist her face all up; I mean she's got simply oodles of charm," Rhoda acquiesced promptly.

"Pretty little fuzzy head, like a child," the man said. "Seen her, Jerd?"

"No, sir. Didn't happen to. I was over at the library this afternoon."

"Mother, could Jerd marry Miss Garrison if he wanted to?"

"He certainly could, Julia. Stop messing with that, dear. Put your hands in your lap."

"I'll bet she's got them lined up in serried ranks, back in New York," Rhoda said interestedly.

"Very appealing—very appealing," said the Judge. "Just what you like a girl to be, pretty, friendly, sweet, and good. Didn't you think so, Mother?" he said.

"She's very likable," Mrs. Penfield agreed, with an emphasis on the second word that settled the matter for the whole family, once and for all.

"Mother's probably got her married to Jerd already," Rhoda said.

"You select a trained nurse for me," Jerd observed.

"She's not a nurse, you simp. She took the place of the nurse that they were going to send."

"Poor little thing, it seems too bad to have her isolated down there in the Cottage," Mrs. Penfield remarked.

"Kate and Miss Budd are waiting on her hand and foot, and she's shy, and tired, and I mean she adores being let alone," Rhoda said decisively.

"She certainly is a very nice girl," the head of the house reiterated dreamily.

Meanwhile, Dory shared her supper with Miss Budd and gossipped with Kate and went in to stand looking thoughtfully down at the sleeping Porter, small, red, and uncomfortable in the immaculate whiteness of fresh pajamas, fresh sheets and pillows, in the orderly, quiet room. She had learned at supper that he would have a fortune from his mother's estate, this little boy; it seemed to make him more important, somehow.

Darkness came down upon the garden, and Dory heard the sleepy good-night calls of birds, and the honk of occasional motor cars in the street. She stood on the porch and looked up at the stars, above the tops of the oaks, and the higher tops of the fig trees, and she saw a white Persian cat scouting on the grass, and heard young voices laughing on one of the house verandas, and the sudden buzz of an engine motor, and the Airedale's agitated bark.

She had been homesick for New York, on the boat. Now a new type of heartache smote her, and she had to remind herself that she could hardly be homesick for this place in which she found herself, first, because she had no associations with it, and second, because she was here—she was in it.

Yet it was like homesickness, this longing to belong here, never to have to go back to the old hurtful atmosphere, to have her own share in this teeming family existence, to have a right to pick black luscious figs from the grass and grapes from the arbour, to unite her own chatter and laughter to the gale of chatter and laughter in which the Penfields lived.

"Home," she said, looking up at the great square bulk of the old painted brick house under the dark trees. Some of the windows were lighted, moony squares of white; Dory liked to imagine the high-ceiled, old-fashioned rooms within. A sort of vague envy for the big family wrung her heart, and for a few brief seconds she remembered New York somewhat as her host apparently visualized it: a place of heat and crowds, material—mercenary—tawdry. . . .

MRS. PENFIELD herself had come over after dinner with a bowl of ice cream. Sterling had also appeared, with a small portable radio for their diversion. Julia—standing at a safe distance—had called an amiable good-night, and some quite elderly woman, beside Julia in the dusk, probably Granny Pennoyer, had echoed it. The Airedale had leaped to Dory, leaped back; the Persian cat had walked indifferently across the Cottage porch. Thurston had brought in Dory's larger bag at about five o'clock, and a maid had come as far as the porch table with the supper tray. There was no sense of being shut away from this active group; even the child's illness appeared to be taken by them all with serenity and confidence.

"Oh, *he'll* be all right," they said comfortably, of Porter.

Kate, in charge at the Cottage, turned down Dory's bed and lighted a bedside lamp. Dory went to the sickroom door.

"You're not going to sit up with him?"

"No, I've fixed myself a couch in the dressing room; I'll leave the door open. To-morrow night will probably be the bad night," said Miss Budd.

"My throat feels sort of thick," said Dory reluctantly. "What ought I to do?"

"I noticed you swallowing hard at dinner, and that you didn't eat anything," the nurse said, instantly alert "All you've got, probably, is a sympathetic sore throat—it often occurs. Come in here to the bathroom."

After that Dory spent a week in bed, in all the miseries

of tonsillitis. She was never too sick to be appreciative and apologetic; beyond that she made no effort whatsoever. Even reading bothered her eyes, and solitaire was an effort. She stretched a languid hand toward Sterling's radio at different hours during the day and evening, and came to know KPO and KFRC intimately. She talked with Kate and Emily Budd.

Porter's illness passed its crisis, and he started on the long, slow road to recovery. And on the eleventh day of her California life Dory had an antiseptic bath with the ever-sympathetic Kate in attendance, and was formally transferred to the big house. She walked there, rather limp and broken still, on her own feet, and then for the first time met Granny, a magnificent old person in silk, and Mary Jay, the adored married daughter, high-strung, beautiful, animated, and expecting a baby almost any hour. Also she met Jerd.

It came about quite simply, in one of the shadowy green alleys on the north side of the house, between it and the croquet field. Rhoda and Dory were hurrying there and overtook the tall, slightly stooped, slowly moving figure.

"You know Jerd?" Rhoda, whose young man was waiting for her, said as she ran on. Jerd Penfield turned to face Dory. A lock of bright hair had fallen across his forehead.

"No. I've been waiting——" he said pleasantly. And they stood staring at each other.

Something magical seemed instantly to possess the lane; the sinking rays of the sunlight took on an unearthly beauty. There was a hush over the flowers and the freshly watered green plants; a silence among the lofty spreading branches of the oaks. The sounds of the world seemed to fade far away; there was a faint distant cooing of doves, and the buzzing of bees droned through the stillness like an organ tone.

After a minute Dory, small and squarely planted upon her little white shoes, flushed with friendliness and emotion, the sunshine tipping her fair hair with gold, put out her hand.

"I thought you were—different," she said.

"I have to give you the wrong hand," Jerd explained. His right hand was on his cane.

"Oh, that's—that's all right," Dory assured him politely, clearing her throat, after a pause.

Her warm, vital little fingers still held his left hand tightly. Their bewildered, smiling eyes were rivetted together.

"You're Miss Garrison?"

"I'm Miss Garrison." She was a little breathless.

"We—we seem to have come quite a way to meet each other," Jerd said.

To this she made no answer, except to say, half under her breath, as if she spoke to herself, "You're not a bit like what they told me, not a bit like what I expected."

"And neither are you," Jerd said.

"I thought you were sort of—dark and sad-looking," Dory told him, with a little bashful laugh.

"And you find me utterly commonplace," he added.

"No, not that." Yet there was something unexpected, unalarming, and usual, about his brownness, fairness, and smiling eyes, the simple appeal of his sudden grin. Not commonplace, but friendly—almost endearing. . . .

Dory felt very happy, adjusted, safe, and content, as she walked at his side toward the croquet green. The day was sweet and sunny, the shadows under the big trees as mellow as gold, the outlines of the mild, dignified old white house lent a certain comfortable stability to the scene.

Talking to Jerd Penfield was the simplest thing in the world. He listened attentively to everything one said, and

made his own contributions in a fashion that inspired fresh ventures—fresh little daring raids into confidence.

He was not handsome, exactly. But yes, he really was handsome, too, with his blue eyes not so dark as Dory's, and his illuminating smile, and that rumple of disordered boyish hair that made him look so young.

Doves were cooing in the cotes up toward the farm; a soft, pulsing sound, as tender as the scent of heliotrope, or the sinking light that was shining through the transparent petals of the red roses.

"This is the loveliest place I ever saw in my life."

"I love it. But of course it's always been home to me."

"It feels like home. It feels the way homes ought to be."

He laughed. He was literally always laughing. Anyone gayer, giddier than this tall, stooped man, Dory never had met. His blue eyes were always suffused with laughter; his brown face wrinkled deeply when he smiled.

But back of his quiet gaiety she knew instantly that there was fear. He was afraid of something; his eyes and his smile were afraid of it. He wanted everyone to smile and be happy; he was afraid that he was doomed to the continual realization that the world was a stupid, cold, cruel place—that he must recognize it in spite of himself.

"You're not homesick, then, Miss Garrison?"

"Oh, no! California seems to—quiet me down, somehow. I feel as if I'd always been away, and just gotten back. It seems to—fit into me, somehow—it's a hard thing to explain," Dory broke off confusedly.

"Certain climates do suit certain people," Jerd suggested.

"Well, that's just it. The instant I got off the boat it was as if I had been breathing with different lungs—my skin feels different here, my eyes do. I sleep differently—I'm all let down, rested—in key, somehow——"

She laughed. "Does that make sense?"

"Well, of course. You like our climate. And we—gathering from the reports of my large and variegated family—we like you," Jerd said affectionately.

"I hope you do," Dory answered, flushed and happy.

"If you mean me personally——" Jerd began.

"But I didn't!" she interrupted bashfully.

"Ah, well, then, we'll let that wait." But he was very happy, and she was, too. Anything could wait, nothing mattered, there was no hurry. But they were very happy. Their eyes met, brimming with happiness; they loitered in the green alleys.

"Did Judge Penfield build this house?"

"No, my Grandfather Wainwright. My mother was Isabella Wainwright—but I've always called Mother 'Mother,'" Jerd explained, with a jerk of his head toward the croquet field they were approaching that made the obscure sentence clear. "I don't remember my real mother at all. This place used to be a sort of halfway house between San Francisco and San José, in the old days, before the house was built. My grandfather had a long, hotelly looking place here then, and they say that any gentleman who drove down from the city—thirty miles—could put up his whole outfit here for the night—horses, women, children—everyone. They used to roast a whole veal every Saturday in one of the big Mexican ovens I'll show you this afternoon, and a mutton on Wednesday. They had a pier over where Martinez is now, and they used to bring in crabs and fish every other day."

"Oh, I love it!" Dory said. "It's so magnificent, somehow—done on such a scale. Carriages rolling in under these oaks, and women in hoopskirts—wouldn't it be fun! Feasting and games and everything."

"Great old days," Jerd said. "Here we are!" he added,

as they came out to an open space and saw the croquet lawn and the players before them.

Rhoda and three young men, all dressed in white, were racing to and fro across the cut grass; the brightly coloured balls flew and clicked, the players followed them. There were several enormous oaks on the lawn, and their shadows fell rich and green over the court.

At one side, under the low-spread tremendous branches of an oak, Mrs. Penfield and her mother were established with sewing in basket chairs. At a safe distance little Porter had been comfortably settled with some toys; Kate close at hand to shake up pillows and guard him from the other children. Julia was cutting out paper dolls beside her mother's chair, and Sterling was sprawled flat on the ground, studying.

Above and around them were all the scent and colour and mellow beauty of an autumn afternoon; across the green hedge Dory could see a stretch of tree-shaded street, and other hedges, and other plumy tree tops, and the slant of red on warm russet roofs. Vistas everywhere through the branches showed the green light sifting down; a column of insects buzzed up and down in a sunny meadow space a few hundred paces away, and doves, wheeling on the stable roof, crooned warmly in the silences. The thin leaves of a Japanese maple shone red and translucent in warm sunset air; a cat was curled in the shade, the Airedale nosing about idly, and from the barnyard region off toward the west came the wandering, delicious scent of hay and apples, and the distant occasional moo of a cow, or drowsy chuckle of chickens already turning toward the sheds.

"Get to your partner, Keith, black's dead on white," Mrs. Penfield directed a player urgently.

"Jerd, what shall we do?" Rhoda asked perplexedly.

"'Live on anything?" The word was "alive," abbreviated.

"'Live on the world."

"Then sock."

It was all Greek to Dory at first; but she watched the game with deepening interest and comprehension.

"When you're a rover you can hit anyone?"

"Yes, always fresh on everyone."

"But Mr. King is a rover, why doesn't he go out?"

"He's waiting for Rhoda. She's his partner."

"Oh, but Rhoda's 'way behind," Dory said wonderingly.

"Rub it in," Rhoda remarked savagely. They all laughed.

"Rhoda, you to the shrubbery and environs," the young man named Perley remarked pleasantly.

"I hate you with a deadly and undying hatred, Alan," Rhoda told him dispassionately, following her ball off the field.

"I wish you did," Mrs. Penfield said under her breath. Dory looked at the young man named Perley with a sudden interest.

She was beginning to pick up all sorts of family threads, to perceive that a hundred undercurrents crossed in all these apparently carefree lives. It made them all the more fascinating to know that Rhoda was encouraging a man her father and mother did not like—that Thurston had a slightly anæmic tendency—that Mary's baby was more than two weeks overdue. As for Jerd—but one couldn't pity Jerd. She sat down on the grass near him.

He was stretched in a steamer chair that was evidently his especial place; he was simple, comfortable, keeping them all laughing with a lazy, *sotto-voce* comment upon what was going on that never rose to real repartee or in-

dicated effort of any sort. Anything less like an invalid, a cripple, Dory thought she had never seen. Just being near him made her feel that everything, life and games and sunshine and gardens—everything was deliciously simple and right.

"Rhoda, is that your ball 'way down by the sprinkler?" Julia asked.

"Oh, Mother," said Rhoda, on a great sigh, "couldn't you put her in the sun somewhere, and let her hatch out? I mean it's really too utterly pernicious to have her broadcasting it all over the place that you're dead on the world——"

"Come to me, partner," the young man named King said patiently. He seemed to Dory to have said nothing else since she had arrived.

"They'd just bust us up; I'm going to try my wicket," Rhoda muttered sourly. Angrily, hopelessly, she made a vicious shot; the red ball went trimly through a distant wicket at an incredible angle. An uproar burst forth; Dory, puzzled and highly amused, saw Rhoda break into a dance step. Everyone was shouting.

"She did it!"

"Fresh!"

"To my arms, girl!"

"Oh, help, we're ruined!"

"Fresh!"

"Great heavens, what a shot!"

"Oh, Rhoda, beautiful!"

"Folks," said the young man named King, in the faint simulation of a shout, as he turned Rhoda about to face imaginary bleachers, "I want you to give this little girl a hand. She went over, and she went over big."

"Oh, now we can *play*." Rhoda, red in the face, breathless, radiant with the sudden reaction, said thankfully,

coming up the court. Dory laughed outright at her tone, and looked up from her seat on the grass to meet Jerd's smiling eyes.

It was five o'clock; a Chinese in white and a pretty little maid were bringing tea down to the lawn. Mrs. Pennoyer, Mrs. Penfield's mother, had her cup first; the children passed bread and butter.

"Like an English story," Dory said, in content.

"We need a few curates," Jerd suggested.

"And someone coming in, very hot, on a bicycle," Dory added, and was pleased to hear the pleasure in his own laugh.

The Judge came down for tea, comfortable in baggy thin garments after his city day, glad to have Julia perched on the arm of his wicker chair, and to hear full accounts of the croquet game, and of Rhoda's phenomenal shot.

"And then, to lose the game, Dad! But the very next shot my ball jumped clean over Alan's, and once when Keith was fresh on the world——"

The Judge, drinking his tea, listened attentively.

"Well, come on. Rhoda and I challenge the world," he said, putting down his cup.

"Oh, Dad, will you play?" Rhoda asked eagerly.

"Is he good?" Dory asked Jerd interestedly.

"The best."

"Let me in on this game," Mary's husband, young Dr. Jay, suggested, sauntering down from the house.

"Don't be so silly; it's half-past five," Mrs. Penfield admonished them. But it was no use; the new game was enthusiastically started, with words that were to become familiar to Dory in the months to come. "Take it easy, partner. Don't try any fancy business, just get through and then wait for me."

Before the game was finished Jerd asked Dory if she had seen the farm, the berry gardens and stables.

"I've sort of wandered about there—but only on the first day. Since then I've been too miserable with my throat."

"Then I can see," Jerd said with a sigh, as he reached for his cane, "I can see that there is nothing else for me to do but show you the place, and have it over."

The Judge, standing near them, and panting in one of the pauses of the game, made no sign; Mrs. Penfield, knitting at the tea table, did not raise her eyes, and the old lady apparently did not hear. Yet Dory felt the electric tension that held them all for a minute, and interpreted perfectly the motherly, indifferent tone in which Mrs. Penfield said:

"Do that, dear. It'll be good for you. But don't tire her out, this is her first day up."

"Oh, but I feel wonderful," Dory protested.

They were laughing, she and Jerd, as they walked away into warm, lingering twilight. Everything he said made her laugh; an odd, trembling sense of adventure shook her. Life had suddenly become supremely significant again; everything was important—whitewashed fences, horses looking over them, doves, oaks—words. Words were thrilling; everything one said was thrilling.

"What's this darling little dancer with the white slippers?"

"This—what did you call it?"

"This flower—like a tassel."

"That's a fuchsia. No, but what did you call it?"

"I said it looked like a little dancer."

"Ah, that was cunning," Jerd said.

Their two voices hung in the air like magic filaments

between them. Dory felt giddy; she wanted to laugh for sheer youth and joy and summer.

"Here," said Jerd. "This was the little paddock we used to call 'Pony Wait.' Why 'Pony Wait,' I don't know, for they never waited. We did the waiting. We used to stand here, picnic afternoons, until they came down, shaking their little heads. Tom, my brother, used to ride a big white pony called 'Clown.'"

"Tom was drowned?"

"War summer. Yes."

"Were you in Flanders?"

"I was in the hospital over there, as it happened. They hadn't had any news of me for eleven weeks."

"That made it nice!"

"That made it nice."

"Didn't he know how to swim?"

"Tom? Swam like a seal. He and another boy were out in a launch, and it started to fill. They went overboard and started to swim in. Tom just—gave it up, that was all."

"Wasn't anyone there?"

"Yep. Mother was right on the porch, watching."

"Oh, no," said Dory.

"Oh, yes."

"Kate told me about it the other day. But I don't think I quite felt what it would mean to them."

"And then I came home—wrecked," Jerd said. "I got here Christmas Eve."

"But you cheered them all up," Dory reminded him.

"Who said I did?"

"Kate."

"Kate's a grand old girl," Jerd commented, after a pause, with a brief laugh. "Here—here's where we used to have guinea pigs. In this pen, on the post. They used to

run all over this inclosure. I made this box," Jerd said, "when I was about fourteen. They gave us ringworms—the guinea pigs did—we had to give them up. But many a time I've put my hand in there reaching for the little squirmy, warm young ones. They're strong for the family, guinea pigs are, you know," he said, with his endearing grin, as he seated himself on an old bench, panting a little, and lighting a cigarette.

"I never had guinea pigs. I'm not sure I ever heard about them, even. I never had any pets," the girl observed thoughtfully.

"You were a city child?"

"New York, yes. My father was a dramatic critic, and my mother had been a church singer. But after he died she sang in shows—she had a lovely voice," Dory said.

"And you lived in New York."

"Well, mostly. We boarded a good deal. And sometimes in the summer we went to Asbury Park, because most of the theatrical people Mama knew went there. Theatrical people are lovely," Dory told him seriously. "But the children are *awful.* A great many theatrical children have dyed hair, and permanents," she said impressively, stopping to look gravely at him.

"I know the type," Jerd said.

"It was nicer in winter," she confided. "We used to go to Petitmain's—a French place, with quite a delicious dinner for half a dollar. Salad, chicken, and the best soup you ever tasted——

"It's closed now," she added, as Jerd made no comment.

"But where'd you get your education?"

"Oh, Mama made me read, and write letters—and one year I didn't miss a single day of school. And then, after she died, my aunt put me into the Grantport—she's dean of a college herself, and she would have liked me to go

there," Dory explained. "But when I was eighteen I wouldn't. I went on the stage."

"You did!" He stopped, turning his face to her amusedly. "You don't look big enough."

"I had a good start," she said. "I had good parts. I was 'Nessa' in 'Goldenrod.'"

"You're an actress?"

"I was."

"You mean you've given it up?"

"Sort of."

"For nursing?"

"No, I'm not a nurse. Miss Bence was, and she and I lived together. She couldn't come, so I came."

They were walking slowly toward the house. Dory put a firm little hand under his elbow as a length of wet garden hose, straight across the path, gave his uncertain feet a little trouble.

"Thank you." He looked down at her smallness and earnestness appreciatively. "But then what made you leave New York?" he asked, as they went on.

She did not answer, and glancing at her in surprise, his dark-glassed eyes met her bright, oblique, speculative gaze.

"Just——" she began. Her throat thickened, and the colour rushed into her cheeks. She went on blindly and Jerd kept at her side, and they entered the side door together without another word.

CHAPTER VII

TO-NIGHT, for the first time, she saw the assembled family and shared the stirring life she had watched so wistfully from the outside. Little Porter was already tucked into bed down at the Cottage; Dory was in the big house, her little room just behind Rhoda's.

The girls went upstairs together through a wide, airy twilight in which Dory could only ascertain that everything was just as she had expected to find it—open windows, white curtains, white woodwork, books, big comfortable chairs, old-fashioned elegance and simplicity everywhere. The house smelled of roses, of ginger cookies.

"Julia," said Rhoda, "I recommend a clean blouse, and just a glance at the young mitts."

"You and Miss Garrison are going to talk secrets—I know," said Julia.

"Miss Garrison may talk secrets if she likes. She looks as if she had millions of them," Rhoda observed in her own airy manner. "But I have no secrets, you poor little egg."

"You're going to talk about Alan Perley," Julia shrilled, as she was gently pushed backward to the hall.

"Delightful child," the big sister observed, closing the door and returning to Dory. But Dory observed that she was flushed a little with annoyance, in spite of herself. "Sit in that big chair and just rest until the gong goes," Rhoda directed her guest. "You've been sick, after all."

She began rapidly to undress, a process that occupied only part of a minute, her clothing consisting of a silk frock of the briefest and slimmest type, scanty silk bloomers, a garment some few inches deep that appeared to be girdle,

camisole, and chemise in one, her rolled transparent silk stockings, and her flat-heeled buckskin pumps. Clad only in the combination article, unembarrassed, she fled about gathering fresh apparel for the evening, sometimes tossing her dark hair about violently with a brush, sometimes speaking through a mouthful of toothpaste foam, and finally addressing Dory from behind the agitated rubber curtains of the bathroom shower.

Dory, idle and amused, and infinitely content with her environment, sat looking about the big pleasant chamber filled with the evidences of Rhoda's nineteen years of vigorous living, her glance sometimes travelling to the peaceful twilight that was filtering through the feathery tops of maples and the sombre stiff foliage of the oaks, outside of the window, and sometimes drifting to Rhoda's fat, white, inviting bed, heaped with tiny embroidered pillows, Rhoda's bookcases, with "The Little Colonel" and "Sarah Crewe" and Ruskin and Pater, and a red French dictionary, and a student's Shakespeare all ranged shoulder to shoulder, Rhoda's desk, with a pale pink Limoges inkstand and copper-bound blotting pad, and the long curve of a green quill pen supplying an artistic note among the businesslike sheaves of letters and documents in the pigeonholes.

Through the open closet door she had glimpses of a girl's wardrobe. Spangled evening wear, and rough little brightly coloured sporting garments, a dozen small felt and straw hats, and one or two wide-brimmed ones, a score of brief, flat summer garments, plain linens and batistes, and multicoloured georgettes—pink and blue, red and yellow, white and tan and green, all packed closely together on padded hangers.

A girl's pictures on the walls—water-colours, and the grinning head of a Spanish peasant girl, and the big, softly

clouded portraits of other pretty girls of Rhoda's age. On the dressing table, Dory did not fail to observe, there was the large portrait of Alan Perley. A dozen other pictures of men, snapshots, cadet photographs, groups, were on the mantel, but Alan had the dressing table to himself.

Dory wondered if it was accident that placed a small silver vase containing two creamy rosebuds just beside the picture's silver frame. But of course it was not accident.

"The child has a good mind but she's been atrociously spoiled," Rhoda was saying. She was now partially dressed again, and at her mirror, pressing her dark hair into a cap of rich curves against her fresh young face. "And if you ask me frankly who did it, I must say truthfully that it's my father. . . . " She went on firmly, returning to the subject of her sister after several digressions, "Julia is supposed to be rather delicate, which simply means that she stuffs cones and chocolate bars all the way home every afternoon. I mean my mother hasn't the faintest idea of what goes on among those children, and that practically they're stuffing these impossible things day and night like nothing so much as gourmands."

She brushed an eyebrow artfully upward into an arc.

"My father will jump through hoops for that child," she said.

"That's the Mr. Perley who was playing croquet with you this afternoon?" Dory asked, indicating the picture with the roses beside it.

"That's Alan." Rhoda caught up the frame, dusted it with a quick motion of the loose sleeve of her Oriental jacket, and presented it to Dory's closer inspection. "It's not very good of him," she observed, watching the effect upon the other girl through the mirror.

"He's stunning," said Dory.

"The movies are after him," Rhoda announced modestly.

"I should think they might be."

"Which of course makes my father—simply—*fry*," the younger girl stated impressively.

"He wouldn't like it?"

"Who? *Dad?* My dear, he'd practically disinherit me—I mean, locking me up in the dungeon tower and calling out the reserves and what not—— I mean, he's absolutely *miserable* about it," Rhoda said.

"Well, but you don't like him that much," Dory protested, in a tone of moderation.

"Don't I?" Rhoda asked, with a little laugh. She caught up the picture again. "He's awful nice—and he has a way with him," she mused, staring at the handsome, confident face.

"Well, I know," Dory argued, in a big-sister voice. "But he's not out of college yet, is he?"

"No. He's only twenty-two."

"Well, you don't want to marry at nineteen, do you?"

"Oh, I don't know," Rhoda said, enjoying herself.

"Well, I mean, wouldn't it be better to wait and see what he does?" Dory reasoned.

"Now, lissen, Dory Garrison—you've been in love, don't deny it," Rhoda challenged her, suddenly reversing their positions.

Dory laughed.

"Yes, but it's a very different thing, somehow, when you are a working woman," she suggested.

"I don't see why," Rhoda protested quickly.

"Oh, well, it is. You've no background—no home like this, with a father and mother in it," Dory explained, feeling for words, "no sisters and brothers, and grandmother,

and ice cream on Sundays, and grape arbour, and Kate—and friends——"

"I don't see why that would affect your marriage; I mean that's a personal matter; I mean I think falling in love is falling in love," Rhoda said rapidly.

"But you mightn't see it quite the same—all this—this house, and your father and mother and everything, would make you feel it was all much simpler," Dory offered uncertainly.

"As far as the stage goes," Rhoda remarked, after some dissatisfied reflection, during which she proceeded with the beautifying processes, "*that* doesn't alarm me, because I've always wanted to go on the stage myself."

"Yes, but that isn't the same thing at all," Dory said.

"Why isn't it?"

"Oh, well—the stage is a selfish profession—it has to be. A man is asked places, and everyone says, 'Must we have the wife?'"

"Ah, but I'd be a person myself—I'd be having my own invitations and engagements," Rhoda countered proudly.

"Well, then you might as well not be married; you might *better* not be married," Dory persisted, in her pleasant puzzled voice. "The stage is a sort of world. Your being a rich man's daughter, and an important man's daughter, wouldn't count there at all."

"Well, I never supposed it would," Rhoda said, her cheeks red.

"It's queer," Dory observed. "Sometimes the rottenest beginner, some little sap who has no sense at all, will get into the original cast of a big success."

"I don't care. You have to live your life, I mean your parents did what *they* wanted to do so why should you stay at home practising scales and going to call on your

married sister?" Rhoda demanded, undaunted, in the pause.

Dory could only laugh. Their preparations for dinner proceeded through desultory confidences and comments; the whole big house was echoing to calls and voices, laughter and footsteps, like a sort of aviary. The door into the hall was slightly open; someone was playing a piano downstairs.

"Who plays?"

"I didn't hear you." Rhoda was in the bathroom door, her mouth full of suds. "That's Jerd," she said, listening.

"Oh, does he play?"

"Some. He has to do something, you know. He's been practising for hours every day since he came home."

"He's—awfully—funny," Dory mused, a reminiscent smile in her eyes. "I mean—really funny," she repeated.

"Jerd?" Rhoda answered, with sudden animation in her dark, pretty face, and a sudden advance upon Dory. "I want to tell you something," she began, when Sterling interrupted by entering the room.

"Ro, have you got a pencil?"

They were always nice with each other, Dory thought admiringly, as Rhoda disposed of her towel, girded her thin wrapper about her, and went good-naturedly to rummage in her desk. Thurston now drifted in through the open door, looking young and handsome and charmingly awkward in his dinner clothes, Dory thought. The consequent chatter drew the ubiquitous Julia to the group. Rhoda put on her gown, combed her curly dark mop, under their interested eyes.

"Julia, put that down. You broke it the last time you monkeyed with it. Here, Stringy—and here's my old fountain pen. It fountains all over everything. Don't fill it at that desk, I just put a clean blotter there to-day. Take it

—take the pencils, too. No, I haven't any more, but there's a perfect flock that need sharpening down in the game closet. Come here, Julia—why you get a wind-blown cut and then slick it back like a Carmelite. . . !"

Rhoda's clever fingers were now busy with Julia's colourless mop. The little girl gave a wriggle of pleasure at finding herself included in the group, established in the dressing-table chair.

"Ro," Sterling said, knotting the string of her window shade into a fine, tight rope, "going out to-night?"

"If someone will chloroform the marster, yes," Rhoda said.

"Why, don't Dad want you to go?"

"He objects to the b. f.," said Rhoda.

"Ro, would it help if I took you?" Thurston offered.

"Aren't you taking that little Forrester infant?"

"Well, I could take you, too," the boy said stoutly.

"You're cute—unknot that, Stringy, you poor simp," Rhoda said, in sudden diversion. "No, you're very cute, but if I go, I go with Alan," she added. "Miss Garrison, here," she went on, with a glance through the mirror at Dory, "piped off by Jerd, has just been giving me a free *causerie* on marriage, its perils and pleasures."

"Mr. Penfield never said a word about it," Dory protested, turning scarlet.

"Do you mean to say—your face'll grow that way, Julia—do you mean to say that my dear elder brother didn't give you a pretty strong hint that the family was *agitato profundo* on the subject of the great American drama?" Rhoda demanded idly.

"Never a word," Dory reiterated.

"I'll believe you, because I hardly know you," Rhoda told her. "Stringy, what are you after?"

"Haven't you got a book of French verbs, sis?"

"Thurston took it last year. Jever bring it back, Thurst?"

"Rhody, I have to do a composition on 'The story of a baby dog,'" Julia announced.

"Honestly, children, honestly," Mrs. Penfield said, swimming into the room, buttoning her cuffs, "it is disgraceful the way the girls in our kitchen are treated. Stringy, darling, don't spin that that way, those clocks are very delicate. It's quarter past. You look sweet, Baby; did sis do your hair? Dory—I have to call you Dory—do you want a tray up here, or would you rather come down? Wouldn't it be pleasant to come down after such a long ——Don't do that, Stringy darling, it's such a disagreeable noise. Rhoda, what I came in about was Dad's blue jacket: did that go to the cleaner? Didn't it come home from the cleaner? Would Kate know? Answer that telephone in the hall, Thurston, it might be Mary——"

"Oh, I'd love to go down," said Dory. "I'm like Julia. We like to be in everything, don't we, Julia?"

Julia, whose youthful shrewdness had already perceived the trend of the tide, and who had now attached herself with elfin fondness to Dory, tightened a pipe-stem arm about the visitor.

"It's little Mrs. White, and she says you said something about jam, or something," Thurston said in the doorway.

"Oh, gracious, yes, I promised them some jams for the bazaar—say that they'll be over to-morrow morning; remind me of it at breakfast, someone," Mrs. Penfield said.

"Gee, I've got a good word for 'hanging the fool,' gee, it is a pip!" Sterling exclaimed. Dory looked at him in bewilderment.

"'Hanging the fool' is a game," Rhoda explained in an aside. "We are simply pernicious about games in this household. Even my grandmother——"

"Mother, if I kissed poor little Porter would I get it?" Julia asked pleasantly.

"Scarlet fever?" Mrs. Penfield looked alarm and suspicion. "You might. *Did* you kiss poor little Porter?"

"No'm," Julia said meekly.

"Well, you mustn't think of such a thing," her mother said sternly.

"I do *think* of it, Mother, but I wouldn't *do* it," Julia murmured virtuously.

"I wish to goodness I had scarlet fever; I wish I'd get it before the French exams," Sterling observed fervently.

"Don't talk such nonsense, Stringy. It's a very serious thing."

"Miss Garrison might get it," Julia suggested. "Because she's been right down in the Cottage with Porter, breathing in his breath, haven't you, Miss Garrison?"

"Well, not quite as bad as that," Dory smiled.

"Mother, if you call her Dory, couldn't I call her Dory?" Julia said brightly. "Because lots of times I can't remember Miss Garrison."

Rhoda laughed significantly, but Mrs. Penfield immediately said sensibly:

"Yes, I think we ought all to call her Dory. If she'll let us?"

Dory's bright flashing look and the swift colour in her cheeks were answer. The boys and Julia had gone ahead now, on their way downstairs, and Rhoda, as they came out into the big square upper hall, linked Dory and her mother with an arm about each.

"Rhoda, does your father know that you are going to that party to-night?"

"He suspects the worst," Rhoda said airily.

"Well, I don't think you ought to go," Mrs. Penfield

said in dissatisfaction. Dory hardly heard; she was thinking that Jerd must be at dinner, and wondering if that had all been a dream, that hour in the garden, all the effect of her own imagination, and the sunset, and the sweetness of cut grass and flowers, in the dying day.

In the enormous dining room, so large that even the big round table did not seem crowded, her place was discovered to be next to the Judge, with Rhoda, endearing and coaxing, on his other side. Mrs. Penfield had a boy on each side of her; next to Sterling sat handsome old Mrs. Pennoyer, majestic and active at seventy, serving vegetables with fine old-fashioned efficiency. This left the place between Dory and Thurston for Jerd, and presently Jerd slipped into it, diffusing a general pleasant odour of soap and toilet waters as he did so. Dory could not glance at him.

Soup was served from a big tureen by the lady of the household. The enormous roast, in a field of Yorkshire pudding, came to the master of the house. Everybody ate and talked at once.

"Mother, have we *any* other jam except raspberry?"

"Mother, how does Thurston rank a dance on Thursday night, while I have to stay home and shag away at algebra?"

"Because—don't do that, Juju. Wipe your fingers. Get her a clean napkin, Marie, please. Give it to Marie, darling!—because Thurston got an A rating," Mrs. Penfield explained neatly.

"Advancing her wicked head and beadlike venomous eyes, she struck quickly, fatally," Thurston commented upon his mother's last words, with his gruff boy's laugh.

"What's Dory short for, Mother?"

"Baby, I want to ask you *once more* not to be personal——"

"But, Mother, nobody cares what their names are. That isn't like asking them if their babies died——"

"If you once were named Jeremy you might know more than you do," Jerd contributed.

"It's short for Theodora," Dory explained, smiling.

"Gift of God, eh?" Jerd commented in an undertone, with his wistful, sudden smile.

Dory felt a little throb at her heart. But still she could not look at him.

"What's your word for 'hanging the fool,' Stringy?"

"Oh, yes. Oh, gosh, yes," Sterling's hoarse young voice said earnestly. "I've forgotten it. Oh, yes—it's a pip—you'll never guess it."

"I'll bet it's a French word," Julia, with apparent memories of other experiences, said darkly.

"French words no fair, Stringy."

"Oh, no, it's a perfectly good word. You've all used it to-day," Sterling protested.

They all began a mad guessing of letters.

"Ask 'q,' Mother."

"Oh, no, Baby. 'Q' wouldn't be in it."

"It might be, Mother."

"Remind me, Mary," said old Mrs. Pennoyer in a low tone, across Sterling, "that I had quite a talk with poor Rosalie Wilcox this morning."

"Oh, and was she crushed?—Any more beef, anybody?" said Mrs. Penfield.

"Mother, we're going to ask 'r.'"

"All right. That's always a good one to get rid of. Let's ask 'r.'"

"No, there's no 'r' in it."

"Mother, I think it's simply crazy to ask all sorts of casual letters in that perfectly ridiculous way," Rhoda

protested emphatically. "Because I mean what's the use, until we have something to go on?"

"Well, we had something to go on there," Thurston said.

"Marie, do give me a pencil and paper out of that sideboard drawer," Rhoda requested.

"How many more guesses have we got?" Dory asked, concernedly studying the forthcoming diagram.

"—i— — — —e" was what she saw.

"Two more guesses," Sterling announced warningly, confidently.

"There must be an 'l' in there," Jerd decided. The letter was immediately asked, immediately conceded, and a shout of triumph went up.

On the last guess "jiggle," was discovered; the solvers breathed deeply in relief. In the pauses of a general conversation Rhoda could be heard talking to her father. It was evident that she was his favourite, his kindly, twinkling blue eyes were filled with absolute adoration as he looked at her.

"Listen, Dad, at home and tucked up and *asleep* at twelve o'clock," said Rhoda.

"It isn't that, dear. It isn't that. It's that it doesn't seem to me it looks well for a girl your age to be always seen with one man."

"My dear father," said Rhoda, "I dance with everyone. And I only met Alan last Commencement, so that you *can't* say that—— I mean that four months are four *months*, Dad, and nobody in their senses could call that 'always' . . ."

In the end she had her own way and rushed upstairs to dress. Dory, rising from the table, was addressed for the first time by old Mrs. Pennoyer.

"I've got a favourite little corner of my own on this

place, Miss Garrison, and I like the idea that the moon looks different from there," she said with dignity. "The others laugh at me. I don't mind 'em in the least. I'd like to show it to you."

"I'd like to go," Dory said politely, walking beside her.

"Can I, Granny?" Julia demanded, capering about in that strange activity that affects children, kittens, and puppies as darkness falls.

"No, Julia," her mother said instantly. "You come with me. To-morrow is composition day!"

Dory and the old lady walked slowly through the back garden, past the gooseberry bushes and grapevines, and Dory picked a fig from the grass and offered it to her companion.

"Yes, I'll have that, and find yourself another, my dear," Mrs. Pennoyer said graciously. "Mary," she added confidentially, "spoils all her children. Wonderful mother —but she can't say 'no.' Tom—" Tom was the Judge— "Tom is just the same. I wun't have that child along, racketin' and bangin' into everythin' " she ended, a little fretfully. "I wun't encourage it."

"She's bright," Dory submitted, after a moment's consideration of Julia, during which she had discarded "she's pretty" and "she's cute."

"Oh, they're all bright enough," the grandmother conceded.

"Thurston, he's a darling," Dory said, having observed a special weakness for Thurston on the old lady's part. "And from what Kate tells me of Tom——" she began.

"Ho, Tom!" Mrs. Pennoyer said with a short scornful laugh that was not entirely unlike a snort. "Tom—none of them are like *him*. He was a remarkable boy. Spoiled— *Tom?* Oh, no! No, you'd not find any spoiling there. When he wa'n't more than three years old I said to his mother—

to Mrs. Penfield, to Mary, that is—'there's a boy that will never comb gray hairs.' Too good for this world, he was," his grandmother ended challengingly.

"And you knew it from the start, that he wasn't going to live," Dory exclaimed amazedly, more amazed indeed than many of the old lady's more intimate acquaintances would have been.

"Always knew it," said Mrs. Pennoyer, with stern triumph.

She was threading the whitewashed palings and the green lanes sedately; a sort of beamy, shadowless light lingered graciously on the white-stemmed fruit trees, and the rich dark bronze yarrow in the orchard grass, and the blue Michaelmas daisies. The warm soft air was sharply scented with dew on dry sweet Indian grass and tarweed; when they passed the grape arbour Dory caught the morbid, heavy smell of Isabella grapes.

On a rise of meadow ground beyond the barns, in an outlying clutter of low sheds and fences, there was a high row of eucalyptus trees, and a bench facing the open rolling country toward the southeast. Here Mrs. Pennoyer sat down, and Dory beside her, and they looked down at the town's lovely silhouette in the dusk, red roofs rising through plumy leafage, oaks and poplars breaking the skyline with towering masses of heavy foliage.

The ground beneath their feet was carpeted thick with pale-brown sickles, the air was delicious with eucalyptus balm. An owl, back in the woods, repeated a plaintive, woodeny note, and was still. The Airedale laid his hairy face on his paws, and whined softly, in content.

Dory sensed Jerd's approach before she either heard or saw him. She did not look at him: her heart beat thickly.

He came limping up the rise from the house, between the fences and sheds, under the big trees, as she told her-

self that she had known he would come. He sat down at her feet, on the slippery dry eucalyptus leaves, without speaking.

The curving shoulder of a low hill rose against the mellow southern sky; presently the moon slipped up, enormous and near and strangely radiant, over the brown, oak-dotted fields, and the long Spanish roofs of the College. The last glow of the day and the first silver light blended together. Jerd pulled on his pipe. Dory did not speak.

"I remember comin' out to see the moonrise, just such a night as this, when I was a girl sixteen or seventeen," Mrs. Pennoyer said unexpectedly, "and cryin' my heart out."

Dory sent her a flashing oblique glance in the dimming light.

"Yes. The young feller I was goin' to marry had just been killed," the old lady pursued. "And seemed to me I wanted to die, too."

"Killed in the war, Granny?" Jerd said, taking his pipe out to speak, putting it back into his mouth again. He did not turn his head; he continued to watch the moon and the meadows.

"Killed at Gettysburg. He lay where he fell. His brother, that wa'n't but seventeen, was right beside him, and said he never stirred. Chess himself died in prison," Mrs. Pennoyer added, after a pause.

"Both sons?" Dory's tragic voice sounded in the silence like a mourning bell.

"Three boys in that family. Yes," resumed Mrs. Pennoyer. "I can remember the dress I had on at the time—it was a sort of sprigged calico, pink and green on a yellowish sort of ground—I thought considerable of it. I'd put it on fresh. I was goin' to walk over to the Desborough place, because we'd heard Tod Desborough had been invalided home. And when I stepped into the kitchen my mother

and my Aunt Sis' Lou were there, puttin' up grapes for the boys, and Kate Desborough was sittin' at the table, cryin', and I knew then that the news was for me."

Dory and Jerd exchanged a glance; their eyes were luminous, their own hearts beating the quicker for that old agony.

"Go on," Dory whispered.

"Well, that was about all there was to it. I went up to Kate, and I said to her, quite loud and rough, 'Tod's got news of Joe Post, hasn't he?' 'Oh, Julie,' she says, 'I can't be the one to tell you.' 'Why,' I says, laughin' quite loud, 'I expected that. You don't think I ever thought I'd be happy in this world, do you?'

"But after that I was real sick," Mrs. Pennoyer resumed mildly. "And it was full two months later that I was sittin' out in the arbour, sewin', with two other girls—Minnie Davidson and Caroline Clay—and a young feller in a dirty uniform walked in, with his beard half grown, and his face all sweat and dirt, and says to us, 'Which of you's Miss Julie Plegat?' 'I am,' I says, and we all sort of trembled, for he'd begun to cry—a big man, and a soldier——"

Dory had begun to cry, too; Jerd glanced up at her, over his shoulder, and saw the tears glistening on her face, and handed her up his big soft handkerchief.

"He just leaned on me like a child and says, 'I'm Sterling Pennoyer, and Joe says I'm to take care of you, and for you to take care of me,' he says," the old lady went on. "I put my arms around him—like I was his mother. I had on a thin old white dress that day, with a black sash, and I'd a black ribbon round my hair. I says, 'Captain Pennoyer, for Joe's sake I'm goin' to do for you what I'd do for him. You go upstairs in the house there, and I'll see you get hot water and clean clothes, and when you come down you'll get the best lunch you've had in a long time,

and then we'll talk,' I says. And from that day until the day he died, nineteen years ago this Christmas Eve——" Mrs. Pennoyer added, and stopped abruptly.

After a while Dory felt rather than saw her fumble for a clean, folded handkerchief at her cuff, and wipe her eyes. Nobody spoke for a long time.

"Well, I don't know what got me started on that to-night!" said the old lady.

They walked back slowly toward the house; it was quite dark now except for patches of brilliant soft moonlight, and through the damp air a chill was steadily gaining. Judge and Mrs. Penfield were coming back from a visit to the Cottage; Kate and Miss Budd and the two housemaids were sitting on the grass under the oaks, talking and laughing subduedly, their white uniforms making dull splotches of light in the gloom.

"Jerd, Fred wants to come over for some bridge."

"All right. Do you play, Miss Garrison?"

"Not very well. But I'm tired," Dory's voice said, in the dark at the side door.

"Yes, she really has to get to bed, Jerdy. She's hardly off the sick list."

There were big syringa and lilac bushes at the side door. Dory felt her hand caught, she was delayed at Jerd's side as the older persons went indoors.

"September twenty-fourth, at half-past four o'clock in the afternoon—that's our date, isn't it?" Jerd said.

She was breathless and laughing, small and sweet and giddy, against his shoulder.

"That's our date," she whispered.

"Something happened to me to-day, Dory," Jerd said. "Something that never happened to me before."

"What?" she murmured, her fragrant little mouth al-

most against his cheek as he stooped, and she stretched upward, to whisper together.

"Could it be," he said, "that you measure—exactly—as high as my heart?"

"It might be," Dory breathed back, not knowing what she said.

"Can I tell you about it some day?" Jerd asked, intoxicated, panting a little, clinging tightly to her firm little hand.

"If you like," she half laughed and half sobbed. Then she wrenched herself free, and fluttered, a small white vision, into the tunnel of light from the hall doorway, and was gone. He heard her good-nights inside; when he went in the bridge table was waiting, and Dory had disappeared.

She went upstairs to her own room, back of Rhoda's, and shut the door behind her. She did not light a light, but went to the open window and knelt down at the wide sill. Her world was topsy-turvy about her, her heart beating violently, all her senses in wild confusion. Dory stared out at the silver rain of moonlight for a while, and listened to the friendly sounds of the summer night. She could still hear the owl, soft and plaintive and woodeny, back in the woods behind the farm.

After a while she prayed; the most desperate prayer a woman ever prays.

"Oh, my God, don't let me begin to care over again. Oh, my God, don't let me hurt him. Oh, my God, I have been so sorry—so sick of myself—so bitterly punished, all these years. Don't—don't punish me any more!"

CHAPTER VIII

A TOWN clock somewhere struck ten. Dory got up from her knees and wiped her eyes, and lighted a lamp beside her bed. She had been keeping invalid hours in the Cottage, and reflected that it was about time to prepare for the night.

But it appeared that the evening was hardly begun for the irrepressible Penfields. Nothing like nocturnal silence was to hold the house for hours to come. Julia, occasionally pursued by her mother's voice from below stairs, was running freely all over the upper floor, clad in mismated pajamas. Sterling descended from his mansard floor room, and after a stealthy knocking at Dory's door, entered, with his hair tousled, his feet bare, and the strings of his dressing gown dragging, to ask first, if Dory knew anything about the subjunctive in French, and second, if Dory thought Mother would mind his going down the back stairs for a quart of milk as he was famished.

Dory, shyly admitting that she remembered a horrible sort of struggle with French, and that some dim light on the subject had broken in her last school year, went up to Sterling's room, which smelled of various oils and greases, leather, kerosene, rubber, burned hot wax, and other things, and was in some scholastic disorder. Julia presently insinuated herself into their company, and writhed about in a large chair, while the lesson was successfully concluded.

"Now, you're sure that's all, Stringy?"

"All!" The boy howled. "Gee—it's enough!"

"Julia, honestly you ought to be in bed. It's ten o'clock," Dory argued.

"She'll be running around here for another hour—she no more obeys Mother than a rabbit," Stringy said, drinking milk with an air of one famished. "Gee, she gets away with murder!" he said darkly.

After which he rather surprised Dory by getting into the big chair with Julia, twining his long arms and legs affectionately about the little girl, and beginning to bite the tousled top of her colourless little head dreamily. Julia succumbed into quiet; they were curled together like two monkeys when Mrs. Penfield came anxiously in.

"Stringy, have you seen—— Julia *Penfield!*" she went on; "this is not funny, and it is not cute. You get out of that chair and march yourself off to bed without another word, or I will positively have to punish you."

"Aw, have a heart, Mother!" Stringy whined amiably, sympathetically, preventing any movement whatsoever on the part of his small sister. "It's so hot to-night."

Mrs. Penfield had her latest born by the arm.

"Stringy, I want you to take a thorough bath in the morning, and wash your head," she directed, departing. "Come in and use our bathtub; you boys don't get half wet in the shower."

Dory wandered to her own room, where she found old Mrs. Pennoyer busy with an electric pad, a socket, and extension wire.

"These nights get frightfully cold, and Mary has everythin' as open as a pavilion," said the old lady.

"Dory——" It was Mrs. Penfield again in the doorway. "Now, Mother," she protested, "you'll need that in the night."

"This place is like an ice-box," observed Mrs. Pennoyer. "I have my old hot-water bag."

"I know, darling, but it gets cold."

"Well, then, I have my little stove, Mary."

"I wish you wouldn't," Dory protested. Her white smooth bed was meanwhile being briskly opened by Mrs. Penfield, who lighted a bedside light, plumped pillows, and opened the door into the adjoining bathroom.

"Rhoda's right in next door, there," said Mrs. Penfield; "don't hesitate to call her in the night if you should feel ill, or weak, or anything."

"Oh, but I won't," Dory assured her.

"My daughter Margaret, Mrs. Sylvester, married a navy man," said Mrs. Pennoyer; "they were livin' in England durin' the war, and her experiences were so interestin' that Judge Penfield had them printed into a book."

She laid the slim, amateurish-looking volume beside Dory's bed.

"Oh, thank you," Dory murmured appreciatvely.

Both ladies withdrew, and Dory, without quite closing her door—for there was a friendliness about the household, the whole leisurely business of everyone's getting to bed that would have made that somehow a little chilling—proceeded with the little ritual of retiring, brushing, soaping, powdering—even prayers.

"You actress!" she said to herself scornfully, when she was on her pillows. But she knew herself to be oddly happy, just the same. The bed was comfortable, wide, and smooth, her books were inviting, and the white curtains of the little chamber were moving softly in an evening breeze that was scented by the crowded gardens below.

She looked off her book; tried to think of New York, tried to recapture a sense of the old crowd, the hot streets, the tremendous importance of posters and reviews and openings. She had been absent for just a little less than five weeks—it seemed as many years. Already everything there was dreamy, small, and far away.

Remembering it, she could remember Bruce. His dark, authoritative, definite charm, his flash of grave laughter, his brown, nervous hands. Bruce, whose name had meant heartache to her for almost three years.

The heartache was in abeyance to-night; close beside her, ready to spring, but not touching her yet. She turned away from it; opened her book.

A hand touched her door cautiously; Mrs. Penfield peeped in.

"Dory—you're awake? I wish you'd come over to Julia's room with me—I declare I hate to worry—but just now, when Mary may be taken sick any moment—I don't suppose that child *would* go down to the Cottage and kiss poor little Porter——"

Dory leaped from her bed, reached for a wrapper, and while the older woman talked, they hurried together to Julia's room. The child was sound asleep, her nightgown curled up under her armpits, her sprawling small body entirely uncovered.

Mrs. Penfield straightened and covered her with experienced hands. Dory meanwhile touched investigating fingers to her throat. She looked solemnly, fearfully, at Mrs. Penfield, put her cool fingers on Julia's forehead.

"She *is* hot."

"Well, wouldn't that be just a little too much!" the older woman said, but unalarmedly, patiently, even with a sort of desperate triumph. She led Dory through a large, old-fashioned dressing room, into her own big room adjoining—the girl's first glimpse of this apartment, and of the big double bed that dominated it, and that reminded her of far long-ago theatrical days, when she and her mother had shared one. "Dory," said Mrs. Penfield heavily, sitting down and staring at her, "wouldn't that be terrible?"

"Well, Porter had a very light attack, and he's quite a delicate child——" Dory was beginning dubiously.

"But just at this particular time, Dory, when Mary—— You don't know Mary, she's an absolute baby," Mrs. Penfield lamented. "The minute—the *minute* things start with her she'll want me, and I shall have to stay right beside her—and it's a first baby, you know, so slow!—Mother, we think Julia's got it," Mrs. Penfield interrupted herself to say, as the old lady, wandering about in the nomadic fashion that appeared to be characteristic of bedtime in this house, came in.

"I shouldn't wonder," Mrs. Pennoyer said majestically.

"Oh, Mother, don't say that!"

"I do say so," Mrs. Pennoyer persisted. "Now Julia's got it," she announced to her son-in-law, who followed her into the room.

The Judge, who had his old-fashioned gold watch and chain in his hands, and was winding the watch slowly, looked perturbedly at his wife.

"Sho! You don't think so, Mollie?"

"I don't *know*, Tom," she answered distressedly. "If she gets it she'll get it lightly," she went on; "for she's thin, and she's in perfect health. Those thin children always get through anything."

"I don't think it's anything," Dory now said boldly. "It isn't a bit like what little Porter had."

"You don't?" all three exclaimed hopefully, looking at her.

"No. Maybe she was tired; she was running around here until just about half an hour ago," Dory said, in a whisper. For they had come into the hall, and were conferring outside of Julia's door.

"Maybe a good dose of castor oil wouldn't hurt her, Mother?"

"Oh, Tom, I can't wake her up and begin all *that.* It means the blankets ruined, and orange juice all over everything, and the child halfway up the chimney like a witch."

"I gather that the plot thickens?" Jerd said, joining them. Dory's exquisite little concerned face, turned toward him, showed a decorous gravity that moved him suddenly to mirth. "I left the hall light for our wandering girl," he told his father.

"She oughtn't to be out this time of night," the old Judge observed, shaking his head slowly.

"What is it, Mom?" Sterling asked eagerly, issuing down the stairway.

"Stringy, for Heaven's sake, isn't anyone ever going to get any rest to-night!" exclaimed the harassed mother.

Thurston now was to be seen cautiously ascending the stairway from below; still looking sweet and young and crude, somehow, Dory thought, in his crumpled evening dress.

"What's up?" he asked alertly.

"What's up," Mrs. Penfield answered desperately, "is that probably Julia's got scarlet fever—a light attack of it—from poor little Porter, and that means that the whole house goes into quarantine."

"She wouldn't have it bad, Mom," Thurston said comfortingly, and Dory, knowing how the hearts of both boys must leap at the prospect of an unexpected holiday, and admiring the characteristic Penfield tenderness that could show itself before the exultation did, sent an appreciative glance to Jerd.

"Don't worry, Mom," Sterling said comfortingly, rubbing his head against her arm, taking his brother's cue.

"I *do* worry——" Mrs. Penfield persisted.

"Your mother is thinking of Mary," the Judge contributed gravely.

"Well!" his wife, coming out of a moment's anxious abstraction, said briskly, "this doesn't help any of us, anyway." She kissed her mother good-night, kissed her sons. "Poor Dory! A nice time for you to visit the Penfields," she bewailed.

"Well, we brought it," Dory confessed worriedly.

"Oh, my dear, we'll all get out of it beautifully," the older woman predicted courageously.

Dory went once more to her room. Before she was asleep Rhoda came in, yawning and cold and bored, after what she graphically described as a perfectly pernicious washout of a flop of a party, and brewed herself and Dory some hot malted milk on a small alcohol stove, as a soothing draught before retiring.

"That kid hasn't anything," she prophesied confidently. "It takes nothing at all to send her into a fever. She'll be running around in the morning as fine as ever. Look, Dory!" Rhoda said, extending a small, fine brown hand with a big ring flashing on it.

Dory's eyes widened.

"Oh, Rhoda, ought you?" she breathed.

Rhoda twisted the hand that wore the gem.

"Ought I let a person I'm in love with know it?" she asked.

"Well—your father——" Dory submitted dubiously.

"Father hated Mary's husband at first," Rhoda said.

"Well—but he had a profession—he *was* started," Dory submitted.

"Why," Rhoda said sulkily, why should I let Alan go down to Hollywood in a few weeks and have somebody else nab him?"

"Oh, isn't he going to graduate?"

"He doesn't think he will. He's only sophomore, you know, and he thinks a lot of it is nonsense."

"And he'll go to Hollywood?"

"He has a lot of friends down there," said Rhoda.

Dory reflected, pursing her lips, narrowing her eyes on Rhoda's face.

"You don't like him," Rhoda said quickly.

"Well, I like him, of course. Who wouldn't like him? Only—only——" Dory's voice went rather flat. "Only you've got such a wonderful home here, Rhoda," she offered, a little hesitatingly.

"So has everyone. I mean, you practically have to have a home, when you're young, or where are you?" Rhoda countered logically. "That's what I say to Mother. 'Mother,' I say, 'if I were an orphan in the Shriners' Home that'd be one thing, but I mean I'm *not* an orphan, and there you are.'"

"Yes, but most people don't have homes like this, Rhoda."

"But, my dear, most fathers loathe their sons-in-law until they get fat, and bring the children over on Sundays, and all that," Rhoda argued, with her brilliant careless air. "Dad simply raised the roof and burst into a thousand iridescent bubbles when Mary began to go with Edward Jay—and now he's becoming quite reconciled. Mind you, I don't think what he feels for Edward is the *grande passion*, by any means, but I mean he invites him here—they've got a cottage only two blocks away, you know, and I mean Dad talks as if he sort of would—well, sort of be willing to buy them a place in Varsity Oaks, you know, and all that, and for Dad that's actually sentimental—really it is."

"What didn't he like about Dr. Jay?"

Rhoda snipped at a glittering finger nail with a pair of

small curved scissors, applied the finger to her mouth, and sucked at a microscopic puncture.

"Ned Jay was simply cuckoo about Evelyn Reynolds—she's quite a pretty girl down here; she married Billy Spears," she elucidated. "And all the time Ned was coming to see Mary, he was telling these pathetic sob stories about how he'd lost Evelyn. I mean Dad never dreamed that he'd gone in for miracle recovery and was after Mary. And Mary did double-cross Dad terribly about it, I will say *that.* Did you hear Edward—" Rhoda demanded, suddenly diverted—"did you hear that poor fish-brain say to-day that if he ever had a daughter he'd want her named Eulalia for his mother? With Mother and Dad simply hanging on by the eyebrows until Mary's baby comes, and Dad halfway up the chimney every time the telephone rings, and that poor congenital sap has to spring a name like 'Eulalia' on them—I mean Dad'll simply poison the child with shamrock or ergot or whatever comes handy, if they don't name it Mary, and in any case I think it was terrible taste, right before a young girl like me—alluding to his unborn child, as you might say. I mean there *are* limits." Rhoda finished with an eloquent shrug and a look under elaborately arched eyebrows, as one who rounds out a sentence nicely.

Dory laughed suddenly, without obvious cause, but Rhoda, far from being hurt, was off animatedly upon another tack.

"Dory, I really want to tell you something, and it's really serious," she said. "My dear, have you ever in the course of a virtuous life seen anything like Jerd?"

"Jerd?" the other girl echoed, turning rosy, not sure that she understood.

"Jerd Penfield. My dear, I mean to say that he's absolutely knocked for a row of—well, for a *loop*," said Rhoda.

"Oh, do you think so?" Dory asked, rather feebly.

"Do I think so! Am I blind? Is anyone blind?" Rhoda demanded, by way of reply. "My dear, it's *pathetic*. He's gaga. Jerd! Taking you to see the place—why, it's pitiful. Being so cheerful and heroic and philosophical—— I mean, of course he's wonderful, but he's not Saint Aubyn's Laddie after all," said Rhoda.

"It surprised me to have him so cheerful," Dory said, rather tamely. "I can't imagine being sad with him anywhere about. He's entirely different from what I thought."

"Wait until you see him gloomy, some day; I mean grim and pessimistic and everything."

"But that doesn't sound like him," Dory persisted. "He seems so simple, and friendly, and sunny."

"That's the worst sort," Rhoda said obscurely. "No, but I honestly think it was a case of first sight, to-day, honestly I do," she went on, looking at Dory over the top of her cup.

A queer little warm flutter deep in Dory's heart confirmed it. She merely said, "He's one of the most delightful persons I ever saw."

"And don't you think that Mother didn't notice it," Rhoda added.

"We started right off like old friends," Dory said mildly. And finishing her malted milk, she asked, "What's the matter with it?"

"His knee, you mean?" Rhoda asked, in return, studying the dregs in her own cup, and frowning suddenly.

"Is it the knee?"

"Yes. The right knee." Rhoda's bright face had clouded, and she spoke with a most unwonted hesitation and reluctance. "They'll fix it," she said.

"Well, of course."

"I mean, you can't imagine a person Jerd's age as lame

for life," Rhoda reasoned. "It would be the unfairest thing that ever happened," she said, with the first touch of passion and anger Dory had ever seen cloud her sunny, insolent insouciance. "Because, why pick *Jerd?*" she said.

"I know," Dory said slowly.

"Why should *he* suffer?" Rhoda went on. "He's never hurt anyone. He went into the war for the most unselfish—— I mean, *Jerd* had nothing to get out of it! He never even finished college—he ought to have been rewarded, instead of coming back on a crutch!"

"Only—it didn't go that way," Dory submitted doubtfully.

"Well, it ought to," Rhoda persisted. "And especially it ought to for Jerd," she argued. "Because he's always been worried about—well, the world, you know," Rhoda said, with a gesture of her hands. "Labour and capital and rents and Belgian babies and Armenian famines. I mean we all feel sorry, but Jerd used to harangue Dad for hours on end about it, and worry about it, and then to fill the world with all this awful business of refugees and *blessés* and blind and what not—it's too awful, really it is. I mean it's just as if Jerd had himself been working to make more misery instead of less, do you see what I mean? It gets him, you know, the waste of it, and he just goes gaga for days at a time—thinking and thinking."

Dory could say, after a serious moment of musing:

"Rhoda, would your father and mother like to have him—fall in love?"

"Like it!" said Rhoda, with a lightning glance. "They'd simply kneel down and name the ground San Salvador, believing it to be a part of India. Think what it would mean to him—having someone to care for him, I mean, and caring for somebody! I mean, after all——"

"Rhoda Penfield," her mother's voice said solemnly from the doorway, "I positively do not think this is *right!* Dory is tired to death, we have sickness in the house, Mary may——"

Rhoda fled with only one guilty "Good-night!" and Mrs. Penfield came over and drew a light blanket up over Dory, and kissed her good-night.

"I don't blame you at all," she said, "for I know that girl. She would rather do anything in the world than get into her bed, and get her good sleep. My dear," Mrs. Penfield added kindly, "you've had a terrible day, with all these wild Penfields."

"I've loved it," Dory said fervently, from her pillow.

"Well, I think you must see that we love you, too," the older woman said, departing. Dory lay wide-awake, staring at the moonlight-and-leaf pattern on her wall, drinking in the sweet cool air that streamed in after the warm day, listening to tiny night sounds in the garden.

The house was very still now; there was a sense of deep, weary, peaceful breathing over it, as if it had gone to sleep, too. A cuckoo in the hall struck two. "Wouldn't you know they'd have a cuckoo clock?" Dory thought.

She thought of summer heat simmering over the big Eastern city, and the subways like ovens, and the streets mere cañons of hot shadow between stretches of hot glare; thunder—and the spatter of rain on hot dust, and persons in dim rooms, thinly clad, sipping iced tea.

Mabel's letter had contained little news; Bruce had placed his new play, and Perdita had given a Coney Island party to celebrate. All the professionals were out of jobs. The weather was atrocious. Dory, advised Mabel, had better stay where she was.

Dory had torn up the letter. She resolutely moved her thoughts from it now; moved them to a shady lane, where

a fair-headed, grinning, wistful-eyed man had turned to smile at her.

"He has the kindest, the finest face I ever saw," she said, half aloud. "So friendly—so anxious, for fear you are suffering, or are going to make him suffer, or talk about suffering.

"And so funny! The look—and that voice—when they were playing croquet!"

A new word for hanging the fool; is "e" in it? And the red ball dead on "e"—or dead on—dead on—dead on the diamond ring Rhoda was wearing . . .

Calico. Sprigged with pink—— And a little launch, out on the blue waters of the lake—— Oh, Tom, Tom! Head in for the shore before she fills—before she sinks—spare them the eternal grief and the eternal memory——

"I must get to sleep," said Dory, starting awake, staring about her. "If I might have had—if I might have been —if we should have known," the subjunctive said in her tired head.

She aroused again; she had really been asleep now. A sense of surprise, of impending events, awakened with her.

CHAPTER IX

MRS. PENFIELD, almost fully dressed, was standing at the foot of her bed. The moonlight was long gone, and a delicious pearly glow of morning was in the room; birds were delirious in the garden, and through her open window Dory could see the red colour of the rising sunlight on the upper branches of the pear trees.

"This is terrible," said Mrs. Penfield. "Mary's just telephoned, or rather Edward has. She's all right, she's perfectly fine, but she's driving in to the hospital."

"Oh, gracious!" Dory commented blankly, half awake.

"You'll have to do the best you can here. I didn't arouse Rhoda, for she's so excitable—Judge Penfield is perfectly wonderful, he's driving me right in—I shall take every precaution at the hospital, antiseptic bath and all that—we mustn't look for any news until noon, even though I myself, when Tom was born——"

Dory saw that she was quite unconscious of what she was saying. While she spoke she buttoned white silk cuffs at her fine wrists, shook herself into shape, and pulled down her blue straw hat at Dory's mirror.

"I dread this day—no, I don't dread it, I'm glad it's come," she said. "Edward said she was perfectly fine, laughing and talking. I wish it was over. It may be over now. One does hear of such cases, girls who barely get to the hospital—— I'll telephone—stay near the telephone. Dr. Ballard is on his way over; I want him to see Julia——"

"How is Julia?"

"She seems perfectly—but no, I'm not entirely pleased

with her. She's all right—it's nothing. But he's coming over before breakfast."

Dory was sitting up in bed, as she had sat the night before, her arms about her knees.

"Is that clock right?"

"Yes, it's ten minutes of six. Terrible hour to wake you up; go right back to sleep again."

The girl yawned luxuriously and laid her head on her knees with a deep sigh.

"Rhoda talking to you half the night, and now I rouse you up before sunrise! The Judge is waiting for me, he's driving me into town—I'll telephone. Poor little Mary, it seems too terrible to have it come to her—such a child herself. However——"

Mrs. Penfield reached for her white coat and loose white gloves.

"Don't worry," she said, pale with anxiety herself. "Everything will go all right. It's only when one comes right up against it that one feels—— Of course, it's a time when anything may go wrong—however, nothing does, and one has all the joy of the baby——"

"I'll telephone as soon as the doctor comes," Dory promised, as the harassed voice halted.

"Do. And I'll telephone if there's any news—not that I really expect news before noon."

"Rhoda knows the hospital?"

"Oh, yes. It's the Saint Francis—you might write that down. But Rhoda knows. And the Judge'll telephone—telephone me, anyway, as soon as the doctor comes. Not that it's anything. Poor Judge Penfield, I hoped that Mary's little party would be well over before we even let him know. However—— She's hardly into the hospital yet—it all takes time. We have to remember it's a natural process—they say the Indian women simply——"

"He's tooting!"

"Yes, and I must go." Mrs. Penfield fled, and Dory heard the subdued distant purr of the motor car. She sat on, yawning, looking vaguely about the room in which the growing light was deepening and brightening, and put her head down again on her knees.

"Mary, huh?" said a whisper at the door, and Thurston came in. "I heard the car," he observed, settling himself quite unembarrassedly at the foot of Dory's bed. "Is it Mary?"

"They've just telephoned."

"Well, I guess I'll go back to bed," the boy said, with a heart-rending yawn. "Mom going in?"

"She and your father are on their way."

"That's what I thought." He yawned again, and Dory, laughing, yawned, too.

"Gee, it's the middle of the night."

Rhoda now entered, wrapped in a scarlet silk wrapper, her mouth wide open and her eyes tightly shut, her head far back as she moved blindly upon them.

"Oh, Dory, move over and let me get in with you—there's barrels of room. Oh, I'm dying" said Rhoda between strangling yawns. "Is it Mary?"

"Dr. Jay telephoned about half an hour ago."

"Old Dr. Jay? Oh, you mean Edward? And has she gone in to the hospital?"

"They were on their way."

"Well, what do you know about Mary with a baby?" Rhoda said, entertained with the idea. "I sort of never thought it would come. I'll bet it's cuter than a bug's ear. Thurston," she added, with her own searching directness, "you have a good healthy nerve to barge in on Miss Garrison this way—after all, I mean there's such a thing as common decency and respect for womanhood——"

"Respect for womanhood?" Thurston said, in a mild sort of growl. "What'd I come flopping down from my own floor for but just concern for Mary?"

"It's an anxious time for everyone," Dory said placatingly to Rhoda, exculpatingly of Thurston.

"Was Mom worried?"

"Well, yes, she looked pretty tense."

"I'll bet we have the news at breakfast."

"Lissen, I have a terrible sore throat and a temper'-sher," said Julia, from the hall doorway.

"Meet the family," Rhoda commented disgustedly, turning herself comfortably on the pillow, settling down into bed.

"Honest I have," Julia added, in a whine, making good her entrance.

Dory, reaching for a wrapper, leaped from her side of the bed.

"Julia! You must get right back into bed. Your mother is extremely anxious about you," she exclaimed. Julia was reluctantly hustled toward her own room, Dory hearing Rhoda's elaborately outraged moan and Thurston's "That's a hot one!" as she and Julia departed.

The little girl was finally settled into a remade bed, Dory noting nothing particularly amiss with her except that she seemed a little warm and dry as to skin.

"Now do try and get to sleep again, Julia! It's only half-past six——"

"Once I'm awake I never get to sleep," Julia stated.

"Well, that's ridiculous! Breakfast isn't until eight."

"If you'll give me that book about our neighbours the bugs I'll read until I'm sleepy," Julia suggested.

"I don't think you ought to read at six o'clock in the morning."

"Mother'd let me," Julia wheedled.

"Well, here's your book, then. But promise me, darling —promise me you'll really go to sleep if you can!"

"Oh, I will."

Dory went back to her own room, to find both Rhoda and her brother sound asleep, Rhoda curled into a ball in the very centre of the bed, Thurston stretched on his back on the couch, looking rather like an effigy of himself, with his bare feet crossed and his long body wrapped in his dressing gown.

The morning was cool and bright in the room now, and Dory felt tired and chilly; she longed to creep into bed if only long enough to get warm and sleepy again, but that was out of the question unless both the others were to be roused. She spread a comforter over Thurston without disturbing him and went cautiously into the bathroom, turning on a bath, shutting the door noiselessly behind her, deeply, wearily enjoying the hot water and the sunshine glittering on glass and tiles through the green leaves.

Afterward she put on a sweater over her thin silk dress and made a cautious journey downstairs, opening the front door for the doctor, picking up the newspapers wet from the dewy porch, going kitchenward to whisper the news to half-dressed Flora, the cook, and to Kate. Eventually Dory sat in a porch rocker, watching the drive, and the rising mists and green shadows in the garden, and listening to the late birds. The big house seemed mysterious, silent, and filled with a strange personality of its own in the quiet early morning. It was as if tides of love and sacrifice, fear and hope, life and death and birth flowed peacefully about her, all the concentrated emotions and forces of three quarters of a century of living; every chair, every book and picture, every doorway and window sill had its gracious share in the history of the clan.

It must have been a landmark when it was new. A "farmhouse"—indeed, a "ranch house" to the Californians—set under the old oaks, and with new rose plants and raw roads about it. But now it had assumed the dignified beauty of an English or French country manor; mansard windows high up in the pear trees, brick walks edged with flowering shrubs, lawns, pools, and tennis courts embedded in well-clipped garden beds.

From where she sat she could see odd angles and vistas of the farm region, whitewashed fences and sloping roofs, fruit trees, wide-swung gates; chickens were clucking this morning, and a cow mooed occasionally, everything was awakening to movement in the fresh, sweet autumn air.

The Airedale came investigatingly about the house, and lay at her feet. From the kitchen direction sounds began to be heard, a door slammed, Flora's voice was audible: "It's sour!" and the delicious smell of fresh coffee drifted out and mingled with the garden odours of grass, dew, and flowers.

By the time the doctor came at half-past seven Dory felt as if she had been up all night. Yet she was not conscious of any special weight of thought, any burden of personal worry. It appeared to be the task of the moment merely to live; her mind swung back and forth idly from Julia upstairs, who had really fallen asleep again in spite of herself, to Rhoda, curled up in the centre of her bed, with the knowledge of that hidden engagement ring colouring her dreams, to Jerd, waiting for his operation, to Mary, fighting for her baby through slow-moving hours, in a bright, neat hospital room.

Kate came out, trim and fresh, and opened doors and windows to the new day. The garden was beaded with dew, long green shadows lay wet across it; in the airy upper

branches of the trees birds were looping and calling. At half-past eight o'clock Dory went in to a solitary breakfast. She felt a subdued sort of happiness, a sense of her own adequacy, as she poured the clear hot coffee into her big pink cup.

"Where's everyone? Gosh, I'm late! I haven't any gas, either," Thurston exclaimed, rushing in breathlessly a few minutes later, flinging books and cap to a side table, falling upon his melon.

Immediately afterward Jerd came in, on his cane, and smiled at Dory briefly from the doorway. She had been thinking about meeting him; now it was over, and he and she and Thurston were all breakfasting placidly together.

"Julia has chicken-pox," Dory stated.

"Who says so?"

"The doctor."

"He has been here already?"

"Yes. And he's put us into quarantine."

"Is that right?" Thurston said absently. Immediately fire leaped to his eye. "How do you mean quarantine?" he demanded, hope gaining in his voice.

"Hold everything," Jerd, glancing at him, said drily; "joy never kills."

"No, but how do you mean quarantine?"

"Well, it's not serious, and Ju is over the worst, he says. But he doesn't want us to go about where children are."

Thurston was true to the Penfield tradition.

"Ju isn't going to be very sick?" he must ask concernedly.

"Oh, no. But Porter's had scarlet, and I had a throat, and now Ju has a miserable little contagious thing——"

"Gee, Jerdy, what a break!" the younger brother said, staring. "What a *break!* Mother with Mary, hey?" he mused, in satisfaction.

"Yes. Your mother's gone in to the city to be with Mrs. Jay."

"That's right, Mary's gone in. Never a dull moment in this family," Thurston said, returning to a more leisurely meal, and heaving a deep sigh of relief that expanded and compressed his magnificent chest like a bellows.

Dory laughed. There was something extraordinarily vital and young and fresh about the whole lot of them; their voices were loud and clear, their fine young bodies strong and brown and hard, they were always in a state of interest and excitement—and no wonder, with so many personalities acting and reacting on each other, such infinite possibilities for developments and counter-developments on all sides.

"How do you have your coffee?"

"Speaking to me?" Jerd asked, looking up.

"Speaking to you."

"Two lumps and cream."

"There seems," said Dory, "to be hot milk here."

"Mother always uses it. Put some of that in, too."

"Stringy," Thurston said to his brother, who now entered hastily, hurling his books down as Thurston had done, and eyeing the clock, "calm yourself. We're delivered! What do you know about old Ju having chicken-pox, and no school—oh, beb!"

"What are you talking about? Where's Mother? How do you get that way?" Stringy demanded darkly, sending his brother, the clock, and his food rapidly succeeding looks.

"Quarantine! Julia's got chicken-pox!" Thurston sang. "Eggs for me, Nora. Everything. I'm going back to bed."

Stringy's expression deepened into incredulous rapture.

"'Kiss me, 'Ardy, 'ere I die!'" he said slowly. "No, is that right?"

"Some sister we've got," Thurston said, in satisfaction.

"Some sister is right."

"You wouldn't catch Ju monkeying with a cold in the head, or any of that stuff," Thurston mused proudly. "Gee, I wish I hadn't gotten up. Omelette, Nora, that's the girl!"

"Your mother says—I just telephoned her—your mother says she's thankful to know what it is, and just to keep Julia quiet," Dory contributed, "and Kate and Porter are going to move back to the top floor—the sewing room, she said——"

"In fact, we go into a state of siege," Jerd summarized comfortably, over his newspaper.

"Which doesn't seem to worry anyone," Dory commented.

"Oh, this is nothing for us," said Jerd.

"Is there any news from Mary?" Mrs. Pennoyer asked, coming in very handsome and fresh in an old-fashioned scalloped sacque, with old-fashioned silver scallops matching it in her silver hair. "I've been clippin' those miserable dead marguerites," she said; "he never seems to get 'em all, he waters 'em just as if they were flowers."

"No news," Dory said, raising her blue eyes for a good-morning smile that caught Jerd as well as his adopted grandmother. The man's eyes and hers clung together; the smile died out of both; Jerd's face flushed under his sunburn, Dory's lips were parted, she was breathing a little quickly.

No news. No news. Ten o'clock, and eleven o'clock, and a rather forced cheerfulness at luncheon, and still no news. After luncheon they all went down to the green shade of the back garden and sat under the big oaks, in the protection of the whitewashed brick wall.

Stringy and Thurston had their French books; Dory sat

between them at the table, anxiously knitting her little forehead over verbs. Jerd was stretched in a long chair, resting the bad knee, with Mrs. Pennoyer magnificently established with a cretonne wool basket beside him. Julia crawled about on the lawn with a boxful of small cardboard houses, forming and re-forming a village, and Porter watched her from his chair. Rhoda, whose various young men had come to the side gate or the wall for conferences at various times, was for the moment unattended, and lay in a hammock, supposedly reading, really diverted by the French lesson. Kate, capably dealing with a Gargantuan basket of stockings and socks, sat not far from Porter's big pillowed chair.

It was green, sweet, and quiet in the garden, as different from hilarious noisy yesterday, with its croquet and shouting and laughter, as if years and not hours lay between. Now and then Nora came down to announce the telephone; Rhoda or Thurston would return from it rather flatly, and with sober faces. No news.

At seven o'clock, just as they were all going down from Julia's room to dinner, the telephone rang again, and Dory, who happened to be nearest to it, took the message. It was Mrs. Penfield.

"Dory, will you tell them all that Mary has a dear little girl? Born at twenty minutes of seven. Yes. Everything fine—we all are perfectly delighted, of course. Dear little girl! She's quite small, just over five pounds, but perfectly healthy in every way. Lovely, lovely——"

She was crying violently by this time, and hung up the receiver before the bewildered Dory could hear any more or ask any questions. Somewhat diffidently she took the great news to the others.

But tremendous rejoicings and relief immediately took

possession of the Penfields. They were not inclined to borrow trouble.

"Well, what do you know about old Mary with a baby!"

"Hello, Aunt Julia."

"That's right."

"Now that it's here, it doesn't seem as if we really had expected it, does it?"

"A little girl. Mary always tocked as if she wanted a boy."

"Oh, aren't you glad!"

"Oh, because I mean it seemed to sort of drag along so, and you always sort of feel that any vile thing may break loose——"

"Small," she said. "Only five pounds."

"Well, what of it? She'll eat—she'll grow."

"What else did Mother say?"

"She seemed terribly tired. She said she and your father were going to the hotel to get a good rest."

"What do you know about Mary coming home with a kid!"

"Granny, could you have another baby?"

"Chicken-pox or no chicken-pox, will somebody gag that dear little girl, and shove her teeth down her throat?"

"It all comes from the modern fashion of lettin' young ones say anythin' that comes into their heads. If I had my say——"

"I really don't think you boys ought to be in Julia's room, even in the doorway! It *is* catching——"

"No, get out of here, now, Stringy. Clear out."

"If anyone will tell me why I shouldn't go out for a short run with Alan to-night," Rhoda observed, descending the stairs, "I will be obliged to them."

"We're in quarantine, for one thing!" Stringy said, passing her fleetly on the polished banister.

"For a baby sickness that's no more catching than hangnails!"

"Why anyone wants to go ridin' with a feller like that one," Mrs. Pennoyer observed dispassionately, "passes me."

"Granny, dear, you don't have to marry him."

"I know I don't. And you look out that you don't," Granny countered, with a neatness that made Dory and Jerd, and even the haughty Rhoda, laugh.

They all walked out with the old lady at sunset, to sit on the bench under the eucalyptus, and watch the golden day die in long soft streamers of pink and purple, off to the southwest, and see the roofs of Palo Alto fade into the shadowy greenness above them, and the whole dim softly into the night.

But to-night, when the later moon rose, everyone else had gone in except Dory and Jerd. Mrs. Pennoyer had been summoned to see a caller of her own age who defied even chicken-pox to hear about Mary's baby; Rhoda had indeed gone off with her swain, the small children had gone to bed at dark, and the boys were busy with an oily, fizzing, scorching, buzzing radio experiment in their own workshop.

Jerd sat on the grass at Dory's feet, sometimes looking at the moonrise, sometimes pushing and heaping the eucalyptus sickles with his fine brown nervous hand, sometimes glancing swiftly up at her face.

They talked and talked and talked as if they had only now discovered the power of words, as indeed they had.

"But, Jerd——"

"Ah, but, Dory——"

They had been Jerd and Dory to each other since about five o'clock this afternoon. They both remembered the minute. The names had come easily, with apparent unconsciousness on both sides, but to both they had rung in the air like pistol shots.

"Sometimes I think it's a mistake to take life so hard, Jerd. If one can—just to take the day, and what it brings——"

"Yes, but it's such a mess!"

"But more for you, don't you think? I mean for anyone who feels like you, than for most people?"

"Well, I hope so."

"Because thousands of people," the girl said lucidly, wide-open blue eyes on his face, "thousands of people could be well, and happy, and prosperous, and they just won't take the trouble."

His kind, anxious, charming face was wrinkled into a frown.

"There's so much unhappiness—such teeming, stewing millions of women and babies, breeding and dying like rats!"

"I don't believe it," said Dory stubbornly, in a silence.

"You don't?"

"No. Because," she reasoned, with Rhoda's own bright philosophy, "why *should* they? Nobody has to teem and breed and die like a rat unless they *want* to."

They both laughed.

"No, but seriously," Dory presently resumed, "take when it's boiling hot in New York, for instance, or else snowing like mad—well, it sounds perfectly terrible, if you're somewhere else, doesn't it?"

"It does."

"But *there*," Dory pursued, "why, nobody cares much. People actually love thunderstorms and blizzards. At

least, they won't go anywhere else. Mildred Bence said so. She worked in a settlement house——"

"But if they haven't vision, imagination enough to get out of the rut, then isn't that just as pitiful as anything else?"

And so on and on and on, while the shadows deepened, and the moon rose, and the warm sweet friendly scents of barn and garden drifted about them, and the owl sent forth his strange, plaintive note from the wood.

After a while Jerd was saying:

"I've often wondered how it makes a girl feel, when she knows that a man is beginning to care for her."

"Girls love it."

"But I don't mean just liking. I mean the real thing—I mean the beginning of everything—the splendour of everything."

"Oh." Her voice was small and subdued.

"Would a girl be glad of that?"

"She—might be."

"But how could she be anything else? She wouldn't have to return the—the feeling," Jerd said, very low. "She wouldn't have to do anything except know that she had—had given him back something that was lost."

There was a silence.

"You mean—his faith in a girl?" Dory asked then, clearing her throat.

"His faith in everything. The knowledge that there is safety and beauty and happiness in the world."

Silence again. Then Dory said:

"But suppose she thought he thought much too much of her? Suppose she was afraid that he might—might be more bitterly disappointed than ever to find that she was a——"

"Was what?" Jerd's voice said after a while, in the perfumed dark.

"Oh, just a miserable little failure who couldn't run herself any more than a baby!" Dory said, rather thickly, trying to laugh.

Jerd did not speak at once. He was facing the east, sitting on the ground, with his back propped against one of the stout braces of the bench, and his cane beside him. After a while he said, without looking up:

"That kind of a little girl, with fuzzy hair and blue eyes, and a scared voice, might be just what he needed. To make him believe in someone again," he said, as Dory did not speak. "It means—it means believing in everybody again."

"Jerd," she said, out of another long silence, "are you jealous?"

"As the devil," he said, laughing. And then, pondering it, "No, I don't think I'm jealous. At least—no, I don't believe I am."

Presently he added, "Why?"

"I was just wondering," said Dory. "Kate told me you had a girl before the war," she went on hesitatingly, youthfully.

"Oh, that? Marie Louise Preston—oh, yes. But that was only a college crush," Jerd told her. "That was never anything. She married somebody. I've not thought about her for years.

"No, but the war did something to me," he went on, in a more serious tone, "and I dare say Kate interprets it as being crossed in love."

"She would," Dory admitted, with her little fluttered laugh.

"I don't have to tell you that since I first talked to you——"

"Yesterday."

"Was that only yesterday? To tell you that since I talked to you yesterday everything has turned topsy-turvy in my whole life?" Jerd said.

"No," Dory answered, very low, her voice sounding child-like and clear in the dusk. "You don't have to tell me that."

"Are you glad?"

"Yes—I think I'm glad."

"You think so?" he echoed quickly.

"Well, I guess I'm a little surprised."

"But you did—you do feel—that it means something, Dory, that we couldn't feel all this and not have it mean something? Why, we're talking together like old friends; we've come ten years in just two days."

"Yes, I know."

"And you are happy?"

"It isn't that. It's that I'm sort of scared," Dory said, "to let myself go and be happy."

"Yes, I know," Jerd countered eagerly; "I've felt that way—I've felt that way for years, ever since the war! But just lately—just since yesterday, everything has seemed so right—so simple again."

"It seems to me as if this couldn't be—mine," Dory explained hesitatingly. "Why, I only came here two weeks ago—you don't know anything about me——"

"But isn't that the way it happens sometimes?"

A pause, and she sighed, smiled. "I suppose so."

Jerd laughed exultantly. "You know it does. I don't —I'm not trying to hurry you," he said, as she was silent, and Dory gave a faint, finely ironical laugh in the darkness.

"No, honestly I'm not," said Jerd, laughing, too. "But it means coming out of darkness into light for me," he

added. "I've just—I've been in Paradise to-day! Feelings—emotions that I thought I was never going to have—I've been revelling in them."

"I know. But I wonder," Dory began with some difficulty, "I wonder if—if it could be the real thing—coming so quickly—in just a few hours? Whether one ought to trust that sort of feeling—oughtn't to fear that it might change, too?"

Perhaps the last word betrayed her, for Jerd said:

"You mean about that other man in New York?"

"How did you know?"

"You told me. You didn't mean to, but I knew. You've been telling me all along that there's a man there, and that you like him—liked him—and that you had some sort of a fight."

"It wasn't exactly that. It was that for a long time—oh, for years—I've felt that I cared for him——" Dory paused. There was a silence. "I didn't know that I was so transparent about it, though," she added.

"But of course I knew there was someone," Jerd said. "The only question is," he went on cheerfully, and Dory felt rather than saw that he turned his face toward her as he spoke. "The only question is, have I a chance?"

"His wife is living," Dory said simply. "She's in an institution."

"The man's wife." Jerd stated it rather than asked it.

"Yes. Margaret Macgowan."

"I see," Jerd said.

"She could get well."

"Could?"

"They say so."

"And you've promised to wait, Dory?"

"Oh, no, no—there's nothing like an understanding or an engagement. There couldn't be."

"But you feel in honour bound?"

"No. Not that." She stopped on a troubled note, and Jerd was silent for a little space.

"I'm trying to understand," he said.

Dory left her bench and sat down beside him on the dry eucalyptus sickles, her little straight slim legs and buckled slippers stretched out before her on the slope, her softness and coolness and smallness very near to him.

"There's nothing to understand," she said at length.

"Except that you care a lot for him?"

"Not even that."

"But, Dory—you're making me hope all sorts of things, —you mean you *don't* care?"

"I *did*," she admitted, in a puzzled voice.

"But now you don't?"

"I don't know."

"You know why you don't know," Jerd said, his face close to hers. "It's because you're beginning to like me—frightfully, aren't you, Dory?"

"I suppose so," Dory said.

He put his arm around her, and she trembled from head to foot, and felt a strange sweet heady weakness envelop her, and make her senses swim.

"Then that is it, isn't it, Dory?"

She moved her eyes to him; he saw their solemn glitter in the dark.

"But what else is it?" Jerd urged. "I knew there was a man—I knew there must be. But just let me feel that I have a chance, too."

"It's all different," Dory said. "He—to me—was never like you. I was very young when I met him, and he was—he is very fascinating and successful—he writes plays. And he is rich, too—that is, no matter what Bruce does or

doesn't do," she explained, "he'll have about five hundred a month."

"I see," Jerd said, seriously and respectfully.

"Of course he makes lots more than that," Dory went on, "but still—it's different from the others."

"The others?"

"Well—the ones like myself, who simply have to work for it."

"I see," he said again.

"A girl named Perdita Patrick came to New York," Dory said, "and she—went after him."

"Didn't she know he was married?"

"Yes, but she knew that he liked me. And she got him," Dory said honestly.

"And you came away?"

"I came away."

"Has he written?"

"No."

"He hasn't——" Jerd began.

"It was all different—from this," Dory presently repeated.

"And this is just as—just as real?"

"Realer," she said.

"Then," said Jerd, "you can't stop me from hoping."

"That," Dory told him in a silence, "isn't going to be the trouble."

He laughed suddenly, boyishly

"Then what *is?*"

"Trouble?"

"Yes. You talked as if there must be some."

"We can hope there won't be," said Dory.

"If we love each other there won't be," Jerd said confidently.

She was resting her head against his shoulder now, their fingers were locked together. The moonlight was falling in great silvery blots and splashes on an enchanted world.

"Dory, do you know that I love you?"

Her voice, dreamy, contented, low, sounded clearly through the soft dark.

"You're so *comfortable*, Jerd!"

"Can you believe we've known each other only forty-eight hours?"

"We've known each other forever!" Dory said.

"Can you believe all this is true?"

"No. It doesn't seem true to me. I suppose we'll wake up," she said.

"There doesn't seem to be any reason why we should. Mother and Father are going to be delighted, for one thing."

"You really think so?"

"I really know so."

"I wonder why——"

"Because they know how terribly lonely I've been, Dory, how wonderful it's going to be to me to be happy."

"Lonely in this family?"

"Loneliness isn't a question of having persons about you."

"No, I suppose not." Dory mused upon it for a while, and then said, "It will be strange, never to be lonely."

"This—this leg business of mine doesn't frighten you, Dory? After all, at worst it means hanging around for another operation, if this one doesn't work."

"Oh, no, I never think of that. I'm not very practical, I guess. But we can always—manage," she said courageously. "That—that part of it is all right."

Jerd laughed in sheer pride and pleasure at her valour.

"But something worries you?" he presently persisted.

"No, not exactly. Except—that it's all so sudden—there are so many sides to it—so much to think about. Are we—you and I—really talking about getting—married, Jerd?" Dory asked, wonder in her rich, childish little voice.

"That's part of it, isn't it?"

"The way people do——" Dory pondered, a little awed.

"The way people do."

"And this is the way it happens, all topsy-turvy!" she murmured.

"Sometimes."

"It seems odd. To have left Bruce, only a few weeks ago, feeling that everything was over forever—that I'd never be happy again, and then to have all that sliding away into the background—not counting any more——"

"It will count less and less," Jerd said confidently, as she hesitated.

"I know it. That wasn't love," Dory said, under her breath. "It was all heartache and misery and doubt, and this is all happiness, Jerd—happiness that I didn't even know could be in the world."

"You haven't," he said, "the faintest conception of the happiness that is ahead of us."

"If we could have a little house in the country somewhere, Jerd, with books to fix on rainy afternoons——"

"And then, if it got too quiet, to just run into town in the car, and take in a show——"

"I would never want to do that," Dory said firmly. "I would stay at home, while you went into town, and make you a bread pudding."

"And then, summer nights like this, Dory, we could take our supper off somewhere—some beach——"

"Jerd," she said, after a while, "are we engaged?"

"If it could be that, Dory——?" His voice shook a little.

"I think it could."

She turned her face to his, and he bent his head, and they kissed—gently, lovingly.

"Are you happy, darling?"

"Oh, Jerd, you know it!"

"And you won't mind writing your Bruce the news?"

"I'll—" her voice was dreamy again—"I'll wire him."

"You're sure you'll not get homesick for New York, Dory?"

"I'll need nothing—nothing in my life, from now on, but you, Jerd."

She had gotten to her feet, now she extended a firm little hand, and he stood up, too, and they walked slowly back, through the perfumed dark night together, crossing the strips of liquid silver moonshine, sometimes standing still, in the shadows; Jerd tall and thin and a little stooped, on his cane, Dory tipping her small fair head far back to look up at him.

CHAPTER X

JUDGE and Mrs. Penfield came home three or four days later to find a smoothly running house. Sterling and Thurston had been restored to their classes, the probability of their spreading Julia's affliction not being considered serious, and Julia and Porter, the convalescents, Kate, Rhoda, Jerd, and Dory, to say nothing of the grandmother, were all athirst for news of the baby.

Both saw instantly what had happened between Dory and Jerd, and when Mrs. Penfield included Dory in her motherly kisses, Dory suspected that all was plain. It was only an hour later that Judge Penfield approached the matter bluntly with his son.

"It's this little New York girl, is it, Jerd?"

"Dory. Yes. It's Dory."

"Anything settled between you?"

"Not definitely. But it's pretty well understood."

"She understands that you've a severe time coming?"

"Oh, yes. She understands everything. If things go wrong I shan't tie her to a cripple for life."

"Some women would like that," the Judge mused mildly.

"Yes, and she's one of them. She doesn't want—*anything*," Jerd said. "She's been terribly alone in her life—terribly lonely. She just wants—well," he grinned. His voice stopped.

"A fine girl," said the Judge. "You're sure, eh?"

"I was sure the minute my eyes first fell on her. I won't feel any surer on our golden wedding day. She just walked into a lane, and looked up——"

"Well, that's the way it ought to be, Jerd. That's the way it ought to be. Your mother and I are both pleased. It seems as if this young girl came into our lives at the psychological moment. Your mother and I have always hoped you'd marry."

"I've never really thought of it before. It's all come in a heap. I—can't wait, now."

"Well, that's the way it ought to be. Makes the whole future different, eh?"

"Rather."

"You'd wait until after your operation?"

Jerd's face clouded faintly.

"I wonder why? If it goes wrong I would want to leave her well fixed, and if it goes right she has the satisfaction of helping me through. Of course, we're not talking dates yet—exactly——"

"Of course not. And still there doesn't seem to be any reason to wait. Has she people?"

"Nobody. Father and mother both dead, and the trained nurse she lived with is married and has gone abroad."

Dory, looking particularly small and childish and anxiously expectant, came down to the lawn where they were talking, and the old Judge got up and kissed her.

"Just been talking about you, my dear," he said. And Dory's blue eyes grew even a little more timid, and she widened them alarmedly on Jerd.

"It's all right," said Jerd, grinning. But as the family gathered and rejoiced she was very quiet, and stayed close to his side. Mrs. Penfield was the next to come down, and she also kissed Dory, and began at once to discuss the practical aspects of the news in that delightful way so thrilling and surprising to the innocence of lovers. From this moment the older woman accepted Dory as a supple-

mentary daughter, discussing Julia, her mother's sciatica, Mary's baby's feeding times, the new table linen, the boys' window curtains, and the Judge's big case, animatedly with Dory, while Dory accompanied her on garden rounds, or went into San Francisco in the car for a half day's shopping.

The Judge and the younger children were already Dory's sworn slaves. Rhoda showed her own peculiar amiability and animation in accepting a confidante and companion so close to her own age and interest, and even Mary, the somewhat more contained older sister, in congratulating the newly engaged pair, used phrases that came from her affectionate and loyal heart, and that lingered warmly in Dory's own.

"Dory, I envy you Jerd, I really do. He's only my half-brother, so I can say it," Mary said, a warm light in her pretty dark eyes. "And I envy you the right to make him so idiotically, ridiculously happy, for that's what we've all been trying to do for so long."

Dory would turn innocently wondering eyes to Jerd when these allusions to his loneliness, to his unhappiness, were made. He seemed to her the simplest, the sunniest, the least exacting of human beings.

"Isn't Jerd always happy?"

"Not while there's a single East Indian baby left with a little concave tummy in the world," Rhoda said once.

"He's shockingly, painfully sensitive," Mary said on an occasion when the three girls were alone.

"Jerd? He seems to love to be teased! He never gets self-conscious about being helped on account of his leg," Dory protested.

"Ah, yes, but it's different from that," said the older sister. "It's 'way down deep inside him, a sort of—shrivelling—from pain——"

Dory looked to see all this in him, in vain. When they two were together the sun was always shining and the autumn days crystal clear. His kindly face was always ready to wrinkle into the laughter she loved so much to see and hear; his mirth was irrepressible.

And after all, it didn't matter what the family thought or said of them. They two lived only for each other.

In the mornings Jerd was apt to be busy, either with a secretary named Stokes, a quiet old man who apparently managed all the Penfield affairs, or with an engineer, or group of engineers, who drove down from the city to discuss a project with him. Dory spent this time with Mrs. Penfield, or with the old lady, in her airy upstairs chamber, hearing of past family members and glories, or if Rhoda slept late and breakfasted upstairs, Dory drifted into her room to gossip with her. Sometimes she took Julia to a dentist or music lesson; often she walked downtown with Mrs. Penfield for sheer pleasure in the autumn beauty of cooling days, and they marketed, and stopped at the library and the club, and got home barely in time for luncheon.

The afternoons she and Jerd always had to themselves. Occasionally they went over to the university to hear a lecture; more often they drove up into the rolling hills, and down the western slopes to the coast, where the sun shone still and hot over the Pacific, and sea birds cried above a pre-Raphaelite mosaic of brilliant sturdy small-petalled flowers and thick-leaved plants on the cliffs.

Getting home at five, their eyes still radiant and mysterious with happiness, they would find tea ready, and a croquet game in violent progress. Dinner was again an interval that belonged to the family, and they helped to "hang the fool," and to "buzz," and play "faces," conscious all the time that this was only the prelude to the eve-

ning stroll, and the evening talk somewhere out in the sweet warm autumn dark.

And Dory loved this tall, smiling, slightly stooped man, leaning on his cane, with a passion and completeness that dwarfed every emotion that her life had ever known before. There was nothing in her life but Jerd. His voice, with its mirthful cadences that yet had so poignant a sadness behind them, his thin wrists, his fair, tumbled hair, his attentive expression when one of the youngsters interrupted him with a question, his gentle politeness with the maids, his powerful, alert, quickly flashing mind so contrasted to his patient, slowly moving body, were all a part of the charm that seemed to intoxicate her, body and soul and brain.

To have him humble, incredulous, and breathless before her was unbelievable. To know that every inch of herself, hair, hands, eyes, feet, voice, glance, and words; more, to know that her very frocks, her little white silk hat, her transparent stockings and sturdy little walking shoes, the earrings that gave her small face so sophisticated a look sometimes at dinner, were all precious to him, all indispensable, all miraculously and incredibly his, kept her heart at a hard, happy beat, day and night. She walked on air. The glow of it, the permeating opalescent shimmer and magic of it, got into the very weeds against which Granny protested, into the towels Mrs. Penfield was marking with big monograms for the new household, into Julia's outrageous questions and the boys' artless curiosities. Dory held the little sleepy fragrant armful that was Mary's baby reverently, all the wonder and beauty of life shining in her solemn eyes; her breath was only a trifle quickened when the real plans began, and the loving voices said, "What are you wearing, Dory? Where are you and Jerd going? Won't it be funny to have Dory Mrs. Penfield?"

"Dory, shall we go to Pebble Beach? It's quiet there now, and there are lots of places all around for picnics and things."

"Jerd, dearest, it's all the same to me."

"Tahoe's closed. And Banff is so far—it means trains."

Dory would indicate the Cottage where she had spent her first night in California, all being rejuvenated now for Mr. and Mrs. Jerd.

"I'll walk right from the church to the Cottage, if you say so," she would assure him.

The Cottage was square and built of white painted brick, like the house. It had four rooms, two big rooms and two small, divided by a wide hall that went from the front door to a similar door at the back. Now that door was being changed for one panelled in glass to show the soft green light of the shady lane, and to lead to the new tiled terrace where the young Penfields would spend many meal and tea hours.

The large front room on the left was the parlour; Dory insisted on the old-fashioned title for the pleasant old-fashioned room. It had a white fireplace, bookcases, a reading table, comfortable lamps, comfortable deep chairs. Opposite it, across the hall, was Jerd's little study, with its big desk, and its files and typewriter, and back of it was the big deep bedroom with windows south and east to get the morning sun. Here Rhoda and Dory debated for long hours about hangings, rugs, fat satin comforters, lamp shades. Dory's chaise longue, in ruffled taffeta, the two bedside tables with lights, Jerd's enormous winged chair, all had to be carefully placed.

Across the hall from the bedroom, and past the door that opened on the wide, sun-dappled terrace, was the small kitchen, filled with whiteness; white walls, white

cabinet, white floor and sink and shelves and white-enamelled stove.

The domain seemed to Dory beautiful beyond all dreaming. It was everything she wanted, more than she had ever had imagination enough to want. Even in the October shabbiness, with peppers and oaks embedding it deep in colourless leaves, and painters, plumbers, and paperers leaving the unsightly evidences of their crafts all about, it was enchanting, and Dory and Jerd reminded each other what it would be in the springtime, with lilacs and acacias framing it in purple and gold.

They viewed it with infinite and untiring satisfaction. The windows would stand wide open, flies buzzing in the paint-scented kitchen, buckets and planks cluttering the hall. They stepped around, dodged, squeezed through.

"What a fundamental thing it is, Jerd, for a man and his wife to have a place of their own!"

"What a word 'home' is, anyway!"

"Think of the people who go through the whole of life and never do this!"

"And I thought I was one of them."

"You? Some girl would have bagged you in six weeks if I hadn't come along!"

"Well, no girl had, Miss Garrison. I'm thirty, and I never did this before."

"It's good to be happy," Dory would sigh, a hundred times, a thousand times.

"There was an old fellow who lived down here when I was a kid," Jerd told her one day. "A white-bearded old man. He had a cabin up where the Sunset development is; he lived all alone—we thought he was crazy. I guess he was.

"They always used to tell us of him that he had been

engaged to be married, and the girl was killed the day before the ceremony. It used to seem a sort of joke to me, then.

"But, my God," Jerd said, as if it were a prayer, "if I lost you now, Dory! If it never came true—Pebble Beach, and my wife in my arms—and this little cottage here, and you and I having breakfast on the terrace—well, I'd go crazy, too."

"Something up here would snap," Dory agreed simply, touching the white low forehead where her honey-coloured hair was plastered close, from the warmth and violence of her exertions in unpacking silver.

For the wedding presents were pouring in now. Dory was not particularly conscious of having either expected them or wanted them, but now she found them tremendously exciting.

They were to be displayed in the Cottage, so that inspecting guests could see the new home and the new regalia at once. The very simple, very quiet little wedding, "in view of the circumstances of dear Jerd's health," was becoming alarmingly impressive.

"We can't ask less than two hundred persons. Family alone is more than sixty," Mrs. Penfield said.

"And it isn't ostentatious—to show all these things like a shop?"

"My dear Dory, of course it is! It's barbaric. But everyone does it, and everyone expects it, and you have to do it."

Thus Mrs. Penfield, who was having a thoroughly sentimental, exciting, and absorbing time over the wedding. She went about with pencils, lists, and an abstracted, responsible expression on her fine face.

"White satin and a veil, dear. Do let me insist on that! Let that be my present——"

"But you and Judge Penfield have already given us——"

"Yes, I know, dear. But let your wedding gown be one of my presents. There'll be so many people here, reporters and photographers. Jerd's mother belonged to such an important family! And when I think that she won't be here, to kiss him on his wedding day——"

This consideration often moved Mrs. Penfield to tears. Dory, with her own confiding little chuckle, and that soft little fragrant jumbling of her small person against him that always took his breath away with its sheer sweetness, told Jerd that Julia had quite innocently laid that kindly but illogical ghost forever.

"Julia—and she was in one of those impish moods, Jerd—looked up at your mother like a pixie and said, 'Mother, where would you be if Jerd's mother hadn't died?' and of course there was nothing to say."

"Dory, what do you put on this beguiling little tawny mop of yours that makes it smell so sweet?"

"Oh, don't! It needs washing simply terribly!"

"It smells like attar of roses. Listen, muggins, and stop jumping around me that silly way. Do you realize that at this time next week you will have been Mrs. Penfield for two days?"

"That's why I'm jumping."

"Do you suppose that anyone in this world was ever as happy?"

"No, I don't. No wonder all the books, music, and plays in the world are all about men and women falling in love."

The day before the wedding Dory and Jerd walked the three or four warm green blocks to Mary's little bungalow, and said a formal good-bye to Mary Third, who was on exhibition dressed in exactly two garments, one invisible

and secured with pins, the other a delicate little handkerchief linen frock of Aunt Dory's own presenting.

"Mary, she's adorable in it."

"We just took pictures of her," Mary stated, being at the stage when snapshots of the baby with weeks and days carefully enumerated on the back must be sent to all friends.

Rhoda and Dory went upstairs with the baby and her mother at five o'clock, and Dory sat in Mary's low chair, holding the fragrant, soft, little unresponsive baby mouth against her cheek.

"She's so darling when she's sleepy and majestic this way!"

"Isn't she? I hope you'll have a dozen of your own," said Mary.

"The day before she's married is a nice time to say it," Rhoda observed drily.

"It all seems like a dream," Dory said, with a little laugh.

"To-morrow night you and Jerd will be on your way—it sort of takes me back," Mary mused, taking the baby expertly, and sitting down for the processes of sponge bath and dinner.

"I wish it was me.' Rhoda muttered enviously, ungrammatically.

After a while Dory and Jerd wandered back to the big house, pausing for the usual ecstatic contemplation of the Cottage on their way. It already looked a home in the twilight; the windows were closed and curtained now; Kate and a late decorator's man were doing something to the front door, three caterers and a "special" policeman were discussing deliveries and parking space in the side garden.

"Dory, there are more presents upstairs, and your

flowers are here in my bathroom, and your dressmaker telephoned and said to slip into your white coat, and if it's a shade too long, she'll send somebody down to-night," Mrs. Penfield said, appearing in the dining-room door, her costume capably protected by a bungalow apron and rubber gloves. She had long scissors and some blue and pink hydrangeas in her hands. The sharp sweetness of wet chrysanthemums filled the dim hall.

"Mother, everyone will laugh at me if I am a flower girl and have a pimple on my chin!" complained Julia, screwing herself out of the dining room, and speaking in a loud whine.

"Don't be absurd, Julia. We'll put a little powder——"

"Mother, did you ask Dory?"

"You'll have to get wire—that string won't do," said Mrs. Penfield to somebody in the dining room.

"Dory, aren't red and white, and black and blue, just as good as red and blue and black and white—don't they go just as well together? Stringy and I were playing croquet, and I said I wanted red and white, and he said you couldn't play——"

"Dory, there's a man to see you in the little room back of the library, an old friend, he said——"

"An old friend!" The world turned upside down; her heart stood still. "Macgowan?"

"No, that wasn't the name. I put his card—but it wasn't Macgowan, I know. Stop that, Julia, you'll have it all down. Jerd, come in here a minute——"

"Because when you hurt your leg, Dory, you always say 'black and blue,' don't you . . ."

Dory walked across the hall and opened the little study door. A man was standing there, silhouetted against the dying light at the window, a vague bulk of broad round shoulders and dark suit.

Seeing him there frightened her vaguely but profoundly; he was like a spider—an octopus, something menacing and horrible suddenly discovering itself in all the greenery of her wedding happiness. She felt a wild impulse to call Jerd, to feel his arms safe and close about her. Her throat thickened and her mouth felt dry.

In a moment she saw who it was. Wally Oliver, big, fat, soft, and lazy, whose beautiful little daughter Sonia had married at fifteen, married Tony Reppettino, who had already had two wives, and who was older than Wally himself. Dory remembered how oddly silent little Sonia had been since her marriage, wearing her ring and her name so quietly, looking at life out of such strained childish eyes.

"Hello, Dory. Here with the 'Follow My Leader' company. Couldn't go back without saying 'How do.'"

The soft unctuous voice brought back the Jacksons' studio and the hot sticky summer nights and a thousand other memories.

"Why did you come—why did you come?" thought Dory, smiling up at him, offering her small hand.

He only stayed about fifteen minutes; he had to play that night. "A damn butler's part, on in every act."

After he had gone Dory went upstairs. She felt dazed and sick; her mouth grew dry, her lips parched, her hands cold. Her heart beat hard and fast with nameless terrors.

She closed the door of her room and sat down on the bed. Minutes passed; she vaguely heard voices, slamming doors and footsteps in the hall; she did not move. Presently she got up and went to the bathroom and sponged her face and drank half a glass of cold water. Then she came back and sat down again on the bed.

The ivory satin wedding gown swung to and fro on its

hanger in a soft breeze that entered the open window. Its tight, high waist had an old-fashioned, wide, low shoulder line, and was covered with a deep collar of lace. Its skirts stood out in pearl-tipped petals. Above it hung the lace veil, mounted high on pearled wires. Dory's pearled slippers and transparent stockings were standing on the high dresser; the fat little plain gold ring was upstairs in Jerd's room; the diamond, guarded by emeralds, was already on her small brown hand.

In the twilight of the room other wedding accessories were in view. A plain white silk frock with blue bands on it, a plain white hat with a blue rose, a white belted coat, and a luscious soft white fox pelt, were in readiness for the bride's departure. Dory's luggage was there; a pigskin case with her new initials on it, a wardrobe trunk already filled with silkiness and sweetness, layers of white paper, scatterings of fragrance.

Jewellers' boxes piled neatly in a corner; Rhoda's blank-book, filled with lists and memoranda on the desk; and on the bureau the collection of small articles that Julia's superstition had inspired her to gather together: the lace handkerchief Granny had carried at her own wedding for "something old," the little gold hair net for Dory's tawny locks, for "something new," the silver-buckled blue garters for "something blue," and finally Mary's pearl pins to hold the veil in place, for "something borrowed."

Dory went to the window and looked out. She could not see the Cottage; the tops of the trees hid it. But she could see the familiar roadway that led in that direction, and the "special" policeman still consulting with Kate. Thurston, busy and efficient, swept through the side gate in his own disreputable car and began to unload chairs at the door.

Wally Oliver's oily voice, his repulsive personality——

She had hardly looked at him. She had only been conscious of his intrusion between her and the sun, a black, fat, threatening bulk.

Not that he had threatened. No, he had merely talked. And she had come to her desk, upstairs here, and written him a check for one hundred dollars. Hush money.

It wasn't that, of course. Only—only it made one so sick—so nauseated and cold, to have money brought into it at all.

"Dory—God, I hate to ask a girl for money! But they're not making any, and we all agreed to cut salaries after the second week——"

"Fifty? Why, Wally, you know I will. Or a hundred? Will a hundred be better? Let me make it a hundred?"

"Money, huh?" Wally had asked, with a gesture of head and shoulders that had indicated the Penfields' house generally.

"Enough."

"Enough? And he's an engineer, eh? First thing I saw in the paper this morning—— That's how I happened to know where you were. But sa-ay—sa-ay," Wally had said, lowering his voice, glancing about. "The paper said rich."

"They always say that."

"S'pose so. So you've kinder fallen on your feet, Dory?"

"I've fallen in love."

"Funny they should be so terribly nice to you about it. I mean, most folks wouldn't be in such a hurry to marry off a rich son."

"They're like that. They adore him. He was hurt in the war, and they're only too anxious to have him settle down."

"With a lovely wife and children, eh?"

The rest had been harmless enough. Had there been the

faintest hint of a menace in this last? Dory felt a sort of terror stir her, vertigo sweep over her, as she recalled it.

Yes, there must have been. For after that Wally had said,

"Your—your 'intended' knows about New York, does he? He don't mind?"

Her mouth dry, her hands cold, she had answered quietly, unconcernedly, and untruthfully,

"There's nothing he doesn't know, Wally."

"Some feller!" Wally had commented admiringly.

The octopus. The great loathsome dark spider, a black blot between her and to-morrow's fragrance, sweetness, and safety.

"Well, sure, it wouldn't make any difference to *me*," Wally had said magnificently. Another comprehensive gesture had included the Penfields again. "But these people—well, they're different."

"Indeed they're different. They're the most wonderful persons I ever knew."

"They sure are that one little thing," Wally had conceded vaguely. And immediately afterward he had returned to his money difficulties, and Dory, flushed and uncomfortable at the appeal for financial help from a man, and frightened as if in a nightmare, had suggested the check that had closed the interview. She had not asked Wally to her wedding, nor thought of doing so—from the instant of the money advance there was a gulf between them.

"When do you go back, Wally?"

"Well, if we bust up, I may hang 'round for a while and get a job doing something, I guess. But if we don't we leave Sunday."

Sunday! Only until Sunday——

"I s'pose you heard about Sonia and Tony kicking me out?"

"No."

"Sure they did. He's a hot one, that bird."

"Tony?"

"Tony."

Wally had taken his departure, and Dory had gone upstairs. She stood at the window, thinking vaguely, inconsequentially, now of some detail of the tremendous tomorrow, now of some phrase or expression of Wally's. His was a sneak's face; his was a coward's whining voice. Wally was a sneak, and a coward, and a bully.

It was quite dark when she turned from the window; the garden had disappeared into the dusk. Dory laughed aloud, and a vagrant evening breeze, pouring in over the open sill, stirred the wedding gown softly in the gloom. The veil took wings, and rose stiffly against the pink roses and green leaves that climbed the wall.

"Idiot!" Dory said to herself. "Poor old Wally Oliver, who hasn't sense enough to plan anything—anticipate anything. And you're letting him scare you to death. He's amiable and he has no friends here, and nothing to do, and seeing your name in the paper of course he comes wandering down to see what's going on. Poor Wally! The loan didn't mean anything, he used to borrow from Bruce all the time, and it probably was an afterthought, when he discovered that Jerd has plenty.

"How I wish—to *goodness* he hadn't happened to read that newspaper!" Dory said, half aloud. "I hate Wally Oliver, I always have. No wonder Sonia kicked him out. I'd kick him out. Oh, dear . . ."

The thing receded, came nearer, waned and strengthened maddeningly. Her mind was already weary of it. Was it significant? Wasn't it?

Dory tossed her head, and with the gesture tossed the troubling thought resolutely away. The best thing to do was to forget it. She brushed up her soft hair and changed to her slippers, stopping now and then to admire her wedding gown, holding it wide with both hands.

"Funny!" she said aloud more than once.

WHEN the gong sounded she went downstairs to dinner in high spirits, so much so that Rhoda reproached her.

"Really, Dory, there are conventions, there is decorum. To be yelling and singing all over the place——"

"I'm happy," said Dory shamelessly.

"She loves Jerd and she isn't ashamed to show it," Mrs Penfield clucked, in an approving tone. "That's just as it should be."

"Mother, you're priceless," Rhoda commented, slipping into her place at her father's right.

"Just as it should be—just as it should be," the Judge intoned absently. "For there's nothing half so sweet in life as love's young dream."

"If any more people invite themselves," Mrs. Penfield, busy with her soup, said firmly, "I'll disconnect the telephone until after the wedding."

"Rhoda, are you going to marry Alan Perley?"

"No, my dear sister, I'm not. Mother, just because she had an infected mastoid when she was two, does Julia have to say everything that comes into her head? I mean is she going to grow up blasting into conversations——"

"Who was your caller, darling?"

"A man I knew in New York, an actor. He's here with the 'Follow My Leader' company. He's a lazy, worthless sort of old fellow."

Dory could laugh at him, poor contemptible old Wally, and it lessened the fright.

"Did you ask him to come to-morrow?"

"Oh, no, he's not that kind of a friend."

"There's a gentleman to see you, Miss Garrison," said Nora, at Dory's ear. Dory's frightened eyes jumped to the girl's face.

"Mr. Oliver?"

"He didn't give me his name. He said he would like to see you for a minute, for he had to get back to town. But it wasn't the same one that was here before dinner," said Nora.

"Wasn't?"

"No, ma'am."

"Oh, well," Dory said, in relief.

"Perhaps it's the press?" Jerd suggested.

"I think it's *terrible* to interrupt her dinner," Mrs. Penfield began fretfully.

"I'll be right back—I can't imagine who it could be," Dory said, crumpling her big stiff napkin at her plate, and slipping away.

"If it's the man about the silver that was monogrammed 'B' instead of 'P'——" Rhoda called after her.

"I'll send for you," Dory called back.

This man was in the drawing room; a squarely built man in a tan suit, who had his back to the opened door, and was staring out of the window, up at the trees.

"Bruce!" Dory whispered.

He wheeled about; their hands locked; they were both laughing with excitement. Bruce put his arm about her shoulders, held her close.

"But where'd you come from?"

"I got in at six."

"To——?"

"To San Francisco."

"But, Bruce dear, at six! And it's barely half-past seven. You must have—— But of course, you came straight down."

"Why not? But does it occur to you that you haven't kissed me?"

She was beginning to look puzzled and troubled now, but she managed an unhappy little laugh as she repaired the omission.

After the quick, unemotional little kiss, she said, in a rush:

"You knew that I was going to get married?"

Bruce's expression changed.

"No," he said slowly. "I didn't know that."

Dory tried to recapture the gay spontaneousness of a moment ago.

"Yes. But you got my letter, didn't you?"

"No, I didn't get any letter."

"But I wrote you. Weeks ago! It must be two weeks ago."

"I didn't get it," Bruce repeated, his eyes narrowed as he looked away.

"Oh, I'm sorry," Dory said, rather frightened, rather faintly, in the silence.

"No, I haven't heard from you at all," he said, in a light, level voice.

"Oh——?" she said, her heart beating thickly and uneasily.

There was a silence.

"Margaret died a week ago," Bruce stated flatly, ending it.

"Your wife?" Dory whispered. He nodded.

"Oh!" she breathed. "Oh!" And then, hesitatingly, "I'm so—sorry, Bruce. I mean—I know it was hard for you. I'm—I'm awfully sorry."

"She had been better," Bruce observed. "She had been well enough to go with her mother to the Canadian camp. And then suddenly she failed—it was the heart.

They wired me just a week ago to-day, and I went up. And then after it was all over, I started West."

"You hadn't written me," Dory said slowly, wretchedly.

"Would it have made a difference?"

She smiled, shook her head.

"No, it wouldn't have made any difference."

"Well, then," Bruce said, "that's that."

He looked older and more serious than she remembered him; there were touches of pure silver in the crisply cut hair at his ears. Bruce, brown and square and grave—it seemed strange to Dory to be talking to Bruce again.

"Tell me about the man you're going to marry, Dory?"

"His name is Jerd—Jeremy Paul Penfield—isn't it a name? He's an engineer. It's the family I've been living with since I came to California—Judge Penfield's family."

"And is he—nice?"

"Oh, Bruce!"

"Wasn't this rather sudden, Dory?" The low pleasant voice, the concerned dark eyes she remembered so well; only somehow they were not thrilling any more, just brotherly and dear.

"First sight, both sides. We were—" she shrugged, spread her hands open eloquently—"we were knocked in a heap."

"And you're happy?"

"Oh, Bruce!" Once again it was all she could find to say.

Bruce had his hands on her shoulders; he looked into her eyes.

"Dory, this is an odd break—I always thought that you and I——" he began, and stopped.

Her attentive eyes, raised to his, were apologetic.

"I know," she said, in a troubled voice.

"What was it?" Bruce asked.

"Oh, nothing—nothing that we could help, Bruce. It was just—just that I—" Her eyes watered although she was bravely smiling—"I was miserably unhappy," she went on. "And I came away—took anything that would get me away, and Jerd and I met here, and it—it was all over!"

"You're so sure, Dory?"

She laughed triumphantly, confidently.

"Wait until you meet him!"

"Is he so fascinating?"

"Well—" Dory put her head on one side, her eyes mystical with happiness, half narrowed and smiling—"I think so," she admitted, with a faint accent on the pronoun.

"I've never seen you like this."

"I never have been like this."

Releasing her shoulders, Bruce walked to the hearth. The girl followed him there, and with a quick motion stooped to apply a lighted match to the fire that was laid there.

"The nights get freezing," said Dory.

The flame leaped up silently and wound itself among the red madrone and gray and white lichened oak logs; presently there was a crackle, another, a flight of brisk sparks.

"You say—married *to-morrow?*"

"At eleven o'clock."

"And are you to live here?"

"We have a perfectly adorable place about a hundred yards away. A white brick house with a terrace at the back. I didn't know it until the other day, but this place belongs to Jerd. Only they've all lived here, always."

"There are other children?"

"Oh, my, yes! Mary, who is married and has an adorable

baby, and two boys, and Rhoda, who's a perfectly lovely girl—she's nineteen—and little Julia, and then this nephew whose mother was killed, and Granny—and of course the son-in-law and Jerdy—and now—" summarized Dory, glancing up happily, demurely—"now *me*."

"And you like it, the big family?" Bruce asked, sombrely watching her with a perplexed expression in his handsome face.

"Who wouldn't? When they're all so kind, and so funny, and always in trouble and excitement! And, Bruce, I've learned to drive a car—I drive very well. And play croquet——"

Bruce did not speak. He continued to regard her soberly, his dark fine eyes fixed speculatively on her face.

"Tell me some news of the gang," Dory said awkwardly, suddenly, embarrassed by his steady stare. "How are the Jacksons? How's Mabel? What's—Perdita doing?"

"Mabel's up in Maine somewhere, working. Perdita went abroad this summer with some rich canning people named Jennings from Kansas; she's in England now, I believe."

It gave her obscure satisfaction to hear it. Rich canners did not sound particularly thrilling, particularly enviable.

He had spoken absently, indifferently. Now he said:

"I suppose there's nothing to say?"

Dory's transparent skin flushed again. She looked small and childish, with her brightly black slippers planted squarely on the rug, her small form enveloped in the briefest and plainest of striped silk gowns, and her tawny head a little rumpled from his embrace. Her blue eyes were as bright as a bird's eyes.

"About—us?" she offered hesitatingly.

"About us."

"Well, no, I don't think so, Bruce."

"I always thought—always took it for granted, that you were my own, Dory."

Her nervous brief laugh had a child's innocent ring.

"I always did, too."

"You did care for me," he stated simply.

"And you for me. In the beginning—I mean, after that first night at the Austins's," she countered, undisturbed.

"I care for you now," Bruce said, clearing his throat, looking away.

To this she could only say, after a distressed pause, "I'm sorry."

"What made the change, Dory? This has—knocked the ground from under me. I can't seem to believe it."

"Only—that I did care for you, terribly, *terribly*," she explained, uncomfortably and briefly. "And that—suddenly it was over; like having an arm cut off, or a tooth out. And then—I met Jerd."

"Was it something I did, Dory?"

"Perhaps not," she said bravely. "But I thought you had stopped—loving me. I was jealous—frightfully jealous of Perdita. It seemed to me that she had taken you away from me."

"How could anyone take me away from you, while Margaret lived? Margaret was the reason you and I could not marry, and the only reason. You knew that."

"Ah, but, Bruce, you hurt me so."

"I didn't mean to."

"But you did. You were always with her. You didn't telephone me any more——"

He jerked his handsome dark head impatiently.

"You imagined that."

"I imagined enough to make myself utterly heartsick.

I imagined enough to think of killing myself. It seemed to me I couldn't *live*, and have you care less for me, have things different from what they had been that wonderful first year."

"Dory, Dory, why didn't you come to me honestly and tell me so?"

She looked at him wisely, pityingly.

"No girl can ever do that."

The old-fashioned mantel in the parlour was low, and now Bruce suddenly put his elbows down upon it, and his face into his hands.

"But it's not fair—it's not fair," he said desperately. "You're *mine*——"

Dory had never, in all their years of friendship, seen him so moved.

"I don't think you can—help falling in love," she offered, a little timidly.

"I can't help caring for you, if you mean that," he said bitterly.

And even at this moment she thought of Jerd's contrasted courage, the laughter wrinkles about Jerd's eyes, the tenderness and gallant devotion that made him spare them all the least hint of what he had to bear. Limping about, teasing Julia, smiling at old Hong in the garden, and Kate briskly busy in the pantry, always with a book to quote, a dry, shrewd, delicious comment upon what was going on . . .

Jerd's voice, his step, his speech, his manner all seemed to shame Bruce, too. Bruce, to-night, was everything she had hungered to have him—and nothing. And Jerd might have had nothing, been nothing more than his quietly amused, limping self, and she must follow him to the end of the world.

"Damn him!" Bruce said.

"Ah, no, no, you mustn't say that! People are always falling in love and out again——"

Her distressed, low voice lingered in the empty air; she put her hand on his arm.

"And what'll you do when you fall out of love with him?" he demanded grimly, without raising his head.

"Ah, but I won't. Why—it's a privilege just to *know* him, Bruce—the family, and his friends—you don't *know* what they think of him."

"No, I don't," said Bruce.

"They simply adore him. And to have him love *me*, I'll never understand it——" Dory ended, on a musing note. The man was conscious that she had entirely forgotten his presence.

Just then Jerd put his head in the door, and she summoned him eagerly, going to meet him.

"Oh, Jerd—come in." She was beside him, small and ardent, her little hand upon his. Bruce saw the look she gave him, saw her sweet and entirely adoring beside him; absorbed in him, seeing nothing else. And he saw Jerd Penfield look down at her with something in his kindly eyes that matched the light in her own.

"Jerd, this is Bruce Macgowan, of whom you've heard me talk."

Her tawny head was only as high as Jerd's shoulder, though the tall man was stooping. Jerd held out his hand.

"What are you doing in this part of the world?"

"I had to come as far as San Francisco on business," Bruce said. "I came down here to see Dory."

"Just in time," Jerd said, looking at her.

"I'm afraid not. I've been telling her that I must get away again to-morrow morning."

Jerd was blandly regretful.

"In time to wish her joy, then."

"She knows I wish her that."

"It is going to be the privilege of my life," Jerd observed, "to make that wish come true."

"I'm sure it is." Both the men's voices were edged; Dory's heart began to thump.

"Were you looking for me, Jerd?" she asked him.

"I was. But there is no hurry. Some old friend of Granny's has come in—can't make it to-morrow, and wants to see the bride."

"In Granny's room?" How comfortably, the visitor thought, how easily she was at home in this household, and what an expression of utter joy and confidence came into her eyes when she looked at this fair, tall, gentle man. "I'll go right up," said Dory, with a glance for Bruce.

"No, no hurry. They'll be up there gossipping for hours. And Rhoda wanted to see you, too—something about flowers not coming."

Dory's eyes widened.

"No flowers!"

"Oh, they're coming—they're coming all right, they're sending them down specially on the eight o'clock train. And some boxes have come. The presumption," Jerd said to Bruce, "the somewhat optimistic presumption is that Dory and I can squeeze into our house—which isn't large—by hanging most of our presents on the ceiling."

"Our house—oh, Bruce, you won't see it! Oh, Bruce," Dory said, "couldn't you just walk down there with me now for a second? It's so darling! The lights are on, and I think it's open—I know it is. I want you to see my kingdom. Jerd, could you come?"

"I couldn't, dear. I'm with Dad and Stokes——"

"But *you* will?" Dory said to Bruce. There was a pause; the men looked at each other.

"Why, I'll do anything," Bruce said, with the guest's amiability.

"But he really should see it, shouldn't he, Jerd?"

"Not much to see," Jerd said kindly.

"Ah, yes—but it's so adorable!"

She was excited, weary, hardly knowing what she was saying. It was, after all, her wedding eve, and in their turn she had loved each of these men.

"Take Mr. Macgowan down there, then," Jerd conceded suddenly. "If he can't be here to-morrow——"

"Impossible, unfortunately," Bruce said steadily and sternly.

"Well, then——"

"But why not you, too, Jerd?"

"Stokes is waiting for me, Dory."

"I see. Well, we won't be a minute!" She slipped her hand into Bruce's arm, to guide him, looked back over her shoulder to smile at Jerd.

"If I don't see you again," Jerd began civilly, to the caller.

"Oh, yes——' Bruce turned with a little informal, unsmiling attitude of farewell. Jerd extended his hand, limped away.

Dory caught Bruce's arm again; they went out in the cool black night together, down the wide wooden front steps between the fat balustrades, and along a dark path where an autumn wind was making a stir among leaves. Street lights and house lights shone here and there among the trees; Dory's cottage stood with a wide-open doorway, gushing radiance.

"Kate must be there," Dory said, guiding Bruce toward it.

He stopped suddenly, caught her arm roughly.

"Look here! This is all nonsense, and you know it!"

"What's the matter?" Dory stammered, stopping, too.

"I say this is all nonsense. This business of flowers and silver and all the rest of it. You belong to me," Bruce muttered abruptly.

"Oh, no, I don't, Bruce."

"I say you do. I'm not going in there to admire things—to pretend to marvel at the place in which you propose to attempt happiness with someone else," Bruce said angrily and sullenly. "Don't—don't be a fool, Dory. Think what you mean to me—what you and I have always meant to each other!"

"It's all like a dream, that," she said, in a voice that was itself dreamy.

"Not to me."

"We can't go back, Bruce."

"Why, but you—but you were mine," he said forlornly. "Everyone knew that you and I loved each other. You can't have changed so completely, Dory! You *can't.*"

"But I have," she answered. "Jerd Penfield's little finger means more to me than anyone else in the world ever meant. I wake up in the morning thinking of when I'll see him—that I can look at him and talk to him——

"It's wonderful to me," she said in a dead silence, "to think of being his wife—of belonging to him, and having him belong to me——"

"Oh, for God's sake!" Bruce said rudely, as she paused.

Dory, silhouetted dimly against the Cottage lights, shrugged faintly.

"You mean, that all that—our caring for each other—doesn't count?" the man asked, after a pause.

"No. Because I thought I needed you," Dory elucidated it. "I knew you didn't need me. But I was very young at twenty-one, and frightened a little at being alone—

and ready to believe that because I wanted you—between me and life, in a way——

"You never needed me," she said, thinking it out. "I loved you because I thought I needed *you*. But Jerd needs me. I can give him something nobody else in the world can give him——

"I don't know whether that's clear, Bruce."

"Pity!" he said scornfully.

"Pity? Oh, Bruce, if you knew him! Why, that's *funny*."

Suddenly Bruce caught her arm in a viselike grip.

"And a woman can get away with this, can she?"

"I think so," Dory said steadily.

"The world has changed that much, has it?"

"I think so, Bruce."

"You're not afraid to go straight ahead——?"

Dory was silent, looking up at him attentively with eyes that glittered in the dark.

"Perfect love casteth out fear," she submitted.

"Sowing the whirlwind," Bruce said.

"I don't think so," the girl answered. "But even so—we shall have to-morrow!" she said.

For a long time Bruce stood still, looking down at her, holding her lightly by the shoulders.

Suddenly he leaned forward and kissed her where the soft loose waves of her honey-coloured hair left her white forehead.

"God bless you! Be happy, Dory," he said.

Her face was instantly against his, her little arms gripping him tightly. He felt her cheek wet.

"Thank you," she said, on a quick sob of tears.

"We didn't think it would end this way, did we?" Bruce said.

"No," she whispered.

"And you're perfectly confident about it? You're happy?"

"Oh, happy!" she breathed, on a long, deep sigh.

"Then stop crying." He took out his handkerchief and wiped her eyes, and Dory kissed him, on the cheek this time, standing on tiptoe, in a way they both remembered, for the little caress.

Then he went away quickly, without another word except a good-bye, through the darkness, and Dory heard the garden gate click behind him.

She turned toward the Cottage, whose windows and door were pouring fans of soft light into the dark garden. The Cottage that was to be home to-morrow.

WITH Bruce, walking away into the darkness, Dory let all the long-ago walk away, too, and turned herself to the radiant present. The evening—a short evening, for Mrs. Penfield expressed herself frankly as hating to see a tired-looking bride—passed like a brief dream, and by ten o'clock Dory was really dreaming for the last time in the airy room next to Rhoda's, with her wedding dress ballooned like an inverted flower against the wall, and the veil occasionally mounting up into the air like wings.

Rhoda had to wake her in the morning, remarking caustically that in Dory's place she, Rhoda, would be simply gaga with nerves. Dory, outwardly calm, enjoying her breakfast tray, and receiving news and visits from all the feminine members of the family, was conscious of a constantly increasing flutter in her own senses, too.

The day was brilliantly soft and warm; the big house was filled with voices and footsteps; the Penfields, to whom mere living was exhilaration, naturally went wild over a legitimate excitement.

Mary left the baby and arrived at about nine o'clock—"not to miss anything." Jerd and Thurston were heard at the side door at an early hour, discussing Jerd's twinkling new car. Flora, the cook, brought Dory's tray up herself, and bemoaned the fact that the fools of caterers' men had monkeyed with the electricity, puttin' their old palms and flowers around, and the oven had gone dead on her pop-overs.

By half-past nine o clock Julia was dressing, hopping in and out of Dory's room like a nest-building bird.

"These are my socks Aunt Margaret got in Paris."

"They're darling."

"Do you mean to say that you're not just crazy with excitement 'way down inside?"

"Why specify 'way down inside? I'm crazy with excitement from head to foot."

Mrs. Pennoyer came majestically downstairs and sat in Dory's room.

"Granny, it's quarter past ten."

"I can see the clock. But nobody cares what an old woman looks like. I may wear my old blue, anyway. That woman has the armholes so tight I wun't be able to——"

Mrs. Penfield arrived.

"Mother, look! Look at the way it falls into curls around her forehead. It's going to be a shame to put the veil over it."

Then Jerd, in the hall, and Dory's happy, confused heart leaping at the sound of his voice.

"How's it going, Dory?"

"Oh, Jerd! Oh, fine, Jerd!"

"See you later, dear!"

"Yes. But—but I have a date at eleven."

And then they all laughed, and Dory, shod and stockinged and undergarmented in peachy silk, and girdled in peachy satin—"for my wedding," as her bewildered thoughts kept reiterating—saw herself flush brightly in the mirror as she went on with her hairdressing. When her arms were lifted the loose sleeves of her thin cotton Japanese dressing sacque rose like wings; Kate was holding the brief, flowerlike satin wedding gown in readiness now; everyone watched as she slipped it down over Dory's trim tawny head and bare shoulders.

The room was scented with flowers, scented with perfumes and powders and the sweet garden odours that

came in from below. It was going to be a hot day. Julia and Rhoda had big round bouquets in lace paper to match their quaint ruffled taffeta costumes and the tipped straw saucer hats that were tied under their chins, and Dory had a similar nosegay, except that hers was all white—white camellias and white roses, lilies of the valley, and the delicious double white violets whose fragrance would always bring back to her this exquisite day.

The clock said eleven, but Granny, who had disappeared upstairs, hadn't come down again, and anyway, Mother was crying, her face all stained. And then Dory's lip trembled, and everyone had to begin to talk and laugh, during which time Kate carried her coat, and Stringy her suitcase, downstairs to the side door, and then far below someone—two persons, rather—began to play the wedding march on violin and piano——

"Aren't we going to wait for the people?" the bride asked nervously.

"What people?"

"Why, the guests?"

"Oh, they're all there, my dear—packed. Everyone's there."

"Go on down with the ribbons, Julia, you and Porter. It's twenty after."

"Oughtn't Mother go first?"

"I'm going right down. Come on, Granny. You look perfectly lovely."

"I look perfectly ridiculous. Wockin' in there to the weddin' march as if I was the bride——!"

"But come on, Mother darling. It's twenty——"

"Mother, Stringy——"

"Where's your father? Here you are, Tom! There's your new daughter——"

"Doesn't she look lovely, Dad?"

"Why, Dory! Why, Dory! Well, they certainly picked me a pretty one while they were about it. Time for our big scene, eh?"

After all, she couldn't think of anything, now, and didn't want to. It was enough merely to be; Dory was alive, ecstatically alive in every fibre of her being. This was her wedding day; she was being married to Jerd.

In a dream she came slowly down the wide hall stairway, her little hand in the Judge's arm, and everyone was very silent while they walked between the white ribbons and the watching faces. Ahead of her Dory saw Jerd, against a background of palm fronds and masses of white and green, cloth of gold and candles burning oddly in the light. A tall man, his own anxious, wistful smile on his face, his fair head bent forward a little as he watched her, was waiting. After that she saw nothing else at all.

A rather awed-looking little bit of a wife for any man to claim, with her round white bouquet, and her round, sweet, scared little face, and her ivory satin gown and ivory satin slippers edged with pearls. Dory came close up to Jerd, her eyes fixed on his expectantly, confidently, and he took her hand firmly in his, and they stood so through the little ceremony; he could hear her quick breathing; her softness and sweetness were almost against his shoulder, almost touching him, as the great words that gave her to him were pronounced.

But afterward she was laughing and gay enough, being kissed and tumbled, her veil a little slipped backward, her face flushed a delicious apricot colour.

"Seems to me you're an awful little handful of a woman for anyone to make so much fuss about."

"Oh, but I'll grow, Dr. White."

"You feed this girl up now, Jerd."

"Why, you'd be surprised how she eats, Doc! Iwant to tell you that she's a hearty——"

"Dory, did you see the run in my sock?"

"No, Julia darling. You looked perfectly sweet."

The flowers were wilting against the greenery; faces were flushed and warm; the air was heavy and sweet with the odour of drooping leaves; the violin and piano went on occasionally; older persons in the group were sitting down, eating salads and sandwiches; cups of coffee went about on trays.

Now and then Dory looked up at Jerd, and he smiled down at her, and their eyes were full of luminous content. She was vaguely conscious of a meal; food on her plate before her, and gone again—ice cream in the shape of a bell. Thurston's, at her left, was moulded into a big creamy chocolate-streaked wedding ring; Jerd had a slippery pink dove with an orange wing and a chocolate tail.

Then she was upstairs, in an orderly room very unlike the littered apartment she had left a few hours ago, and everyone was helping her unfasten pins and hairpins and wires, and showering her with compliments.

"The sweetest . . . well, just the loveliest . . . honestly, Dory, never in your life have you looked . . . wasn't she? . . . weren't they? . . . well, everyone says it was just . . . no, honestly, it was about the prettiest . . . wasn't it? my *dear* . . ."

And in the midst of this she stood small and appreciative and beaming, wheeling about obediently, getting into the tan stockings and shoes, the going-away gown and hat, looking into the mirror at a new vision of the bride, even smarter than the last, trim and complete in white and tan, with the big fox fur slung loosely about her shoulders, and the honey-coloured hair curling in silky tendrils

up against the white hat brim, and the blue eyes shining like stars in a rosy, bewildered little face.

"Dory, you're so cute! I don't wonder that Jerd——"

"I've never seen Jerd like this. He doesn't seem to have the faintest idea what's going on——"

"Edward was just as bad, Mother, if you remember? We laughed so, afterward——"

"Kate, you've been so wonderfully kind to me."

"Well, why wouldn't I be, with you——"

"Dory, if you'n I haddenter come to California, and I haddenter had scarlet, you wouldddenter——"

"Julia, don't eat that here! Well, go put it in the bathroom, then, and wash your hands. One speck of that cream on Dory's gown——"

And Rhoda, seizing the last available moment to finger Dory's white tumbling frill, and murmur:

"I wish it was I, Dory."

"Lots of time, Rhoda. You're only nineteen."

"I know. But it makes me so—darn—jealous."

"Rhoda, it's the most wonderful feeling! To—to think what I think about Jerd—and then to have him belong to me, nearer than anyone else—I can't tell you. It presses up against my heart every time I think of it, and I can't breathe."

"Ah, you've got it, all right," Rhoda said enviously. Dory was still laughing as she went downstairs; Jerd stood at the foot, looking up, waiting for her.

They went out to the car, and the steps and the path and the porch were all filled with kindly faces, wishing them Godspeed on the new road. Dory clung to the old Judge; her last kiss was for Mrs. Penfield.

"I can thank *you* for this!"

"My dearest child, you can thank the fact that he fell in love with you the instant he saw you."

"Yes, but you could have stopped it."

"I didn't want to stop it."

"I know you want him to be happy. I'll make him the happiest person in the world."

"That's all we want."

She got into the car, and Jerd went around it, and climbed in beside the wheel, the engine's sudden roar drowned out the laughter and the messages from the steps. They swept through the garden, sweet and wistful and a little mournful in the windless autumn afternoon, and through the big gate, and down the road.

Jerd drove steadily through the pretty streets, and down to the highway and southward past the Spanish roof of the high school, and past orchards and farms, and through little sleepy Los Gatos, and so west, toward the mountains and the sea.

"I can't talk, Dory. I'm too happy."

"No, and I can't talk either, Jerd. I'm too happy, too."

They sat on the dry brown grass of the cliffs, a few days later, and watched the blue sea, rolling smoothly, mysteriously toward them, never reaching them; threatening the steep rocky shores and the little sandy coves incessantly, yet breaking so gently over them after all.

The September sun shone down hotly upon them, and the breeze that ruffled the sturdy sea growth all about them was kindly and fitful. There were bright chrome-yellow bushy daisies and blue lupine and mallow on the cliff, with a hundred other bright-flowered small plants that Dory could not identify, woven into a carpet pricked brightly with yellow, purple, pink, cream, and blue. She put her hand down among them, and stirred the loose warm sandy soil in which they were tenuously rooted.

The sun was halfway down the western sky, the sky

cloudless and pale. Far out at sea mists were rising and advancing like a wall upon the land. But they were still miles away, and above Dory and Jerd, sitting on the grasses and flowers, the undiluted light and warmth of the day would stream for another hour.

When it moved the breeze brought with it the strong sweet aromatic odours of the shore weeds, pungent and spicy smells of which Dory's lungs could not drink enough.

She listened to the sea birds crying, and saw the shadows of their busy wings upon the rough tangled flowery growth, and she heard under them and above them the incessant rush, pour, and retreat of the great sea, and an infinite peace fell upon her being, a sort of stupor of content and rest. Jerd was half sitting, half lying, resting on his elbow, his back to the sun, his head at her knee. Dory had her back braced against a great rock, her book was face down on the grass. One small brown hand played idly with Jerd's fair, disordered hair.

"Dory, do you suppose most persons have a time like this in their lives?"

"I was wondering——"

"I don't know that most persons really fall in love. Perhaps they do. Perhaps one only sees the outside of things—there may be all sorts of emotions underneath. But I was wondering."

"I was thinking that, too, Jerdy. Thinking of all the girls I knew who had gotten engaged. Perhaps they tried to tell us something of this—only we weren't in sympathy —we couldn't understand."

"Heaven!" Jerd said, under his breath.

Another long silence, then he asked suddenly:

"Where do you suppose your friend Macgowan is?"

Dory laughed.

"On his way East."

"What makes you think so?"

"Why, he was leaving immediately—either the night he came to see me or the next day."

"He said so?"

"Oh, yes, Jerd. He said good-bye that night."

"He came after you!" Jerd said, with a challenge in his tone.

Dory stared down into his suddenly raised eyes wonderingly.

"But of course he did, Jerd!" she said simply.

The man flushed quickly, straightened up a little.

"How do you mean he did?"

"Why—" Dory laughed again—"what else would bring him?" she demanded.

"I thought he had a wife?"

"He had. But she died just a week before."

"And he came straight after you?"

"It amounted to that," Dory said, after thought.

"Well, I'll be darned!" Jerd observed. "No, did he, really?"

"Oh, really, yes."

"He didn't ask you to throw me over and marry him, did he?" Jerd pursued, amazed.

Dory chewed a long, silvery oat spear, hesitated.

"Yes, it amounted to that," she said again.

"That night!"

"Yes. He hadn't known about us," Dory added. "Probably if he had had a letter I wrote him he wouldn't have come. But he had gone to Canada, where Margaret's people lived—she was with them. And from there he came directly to San Francisco."

"Well, I'll be darned!" Jerd repeated.

"I thought you knew that."

"No. And you never said a word about it."

"Well, that night—everything was so confused and exciting. And afterward, to tell you the truth I didn't think about him."

"Poor devil!" Jerd commented, after a while.

"He'll get over it," Dory predicted hardily.

"I suppose so. Everyone does. Except you and me," Jerd said jealously, in detached little sentences interrupted by reflection.

"Ah, well, when you marry—that gives it all significance and—and—there's some word meaning—stability, that's it," Dory explained.

"I'll say there is," Jerd agreed, in infinite content.

The ocean mist was nearer now, moving between them and the descending sun, and the breezes on the cliff had taken a faint chilly edge, and smelled saltly of the sea. Birds cried and wheeled incessantly, and the waves came in with a noisier rush. But still the sun was shining.

"Winter coming, Jerdy. Nice to think of our woodpile!"

"We'll be in Santa Barbara to-morrow, and then San Diego. It's still hot down there. . . . Tell me, did you have much of a crush on him?" Jerd asked.

"On——?"

"Macgowan."

"Bruce? Oh, yes," Dory answered honestly, "I did. I really did. He suddenly appeared from nowhere, a Rhodes Scholarship man who had written a successful play—or no, that was a rather unsuccessful one, the first. We met, and we began to see each other, and like each other better and better—and then he wrote 'Juggernaut'——"

"I remember that. It came out here."

"It ran for eleven weeks, but it wasn't that. It was that every critic went crazy over it—all the big ones. It was great fun, and even though it didn't make much money, it

did give Bruce a sort of position—everyone wanted him to do articles and make over old plays——"

"Were you engaged, Dory?"

"Oh, we couldn't be, Jerd. We all knew that he had this perfectly healthy young wife, who was deranged—they never called it insanity; it might have cleared up at any time."

"That—" he had twisted about a little, he was watching her face—"that make you unhappy?"

"Terribly."

"How long ago was this, Dory?"

"I met him just three years before I came West."

"And didn't—any of it—come back when he showed up a few nights ago?"

"Not a speck."

"It didn't make you feel sad?"

"Sad?"

"Well——" He left it there, on a somewhat shamefaced, apologetic note, and Dory laughed.

"You told me once that you weren't jealous, Jerd."

"I know I did."

"But I believe you are."

Jerd was silent a while. Then he said, in a low voice:

"Yes. I'm *devilishly* jealous."

Dory looked a little startled; there was protest in her tone when she spoke.

"Oh, Jerdy, that's so silly!"

"I know it is."

"Because—" reasoned Dory, "because nobody can take away from you what belongs to you, or give you what belongs to anyone else."

"Dory, don't talk as if a person is jealous because he *wants* to be jealous! I tell you it's a disease."

"Well," she said, after an interval of hair-smoothing,

"you don't have to be jealous of Bruce Macgowan. There he was, mad to have me go back with him, and it no more occurred to me to consider it than it occurs to you to swim out to that ship—— "

They watched the ship, moving steadily into the silver mist. There was a veil over the sun; Jerd's wrist watch said four.

"Time to go back, Dory. We have to make Santa Maria to-night, you know."

"But what a heavenly picnic, Jerd! Let's remember this place, and on this day next year——"

Next year was to be a succession of reminiscent celebrations. For everything they did was perfect and was carefully to be repeated.

Dory walked at Jerd's side back to the waiting motor and jumbled her little self against him on the front seat in her own endearing way.

"Don't be jealous of me, Jerdy! No woman ever loved her husband the way I love you."

"But how to keep you always mine, and nobody's else!"

"We're going to get so that we don't want to see anyone but each other, Jerd."

"I know it."

"It's going to get worse with us instead of better," she offered.

"Oh, Dory, I hope so!" But there was an ache behind his voice, and after a while he added unexpectedly, "I wish you hadn't liked him."

"Bruce?"

"Yes—Bruce."

Dory reflected, while the brown landscape and the hazy sea rolled behind her like a scroll, and then said sensibly:

"Suppose that I had been married before, Jerd, as so many men's wives have been. Then what?"

"Well, what?"

"Would you be jealous?"

"Of a dead man?"

"No, no. Suppose he was living, and I had been divorced. Then would you be?"

"Jealous?" Jerd, driving slowly, his right arm about Dory's shoulders, considered it before answering. "Yes, I would be," he said.

"You *would* be?"

"Yes. Because—I think of you as only mine, Dory, through your whole life," her husband elucidated it, speaking slowly, feeling his way. "I think of you as mine even when you were a baby, and when you were a little girl in school. When you were in that boarding house, with your mother, struggling along, it seems to me it was my little Dory, who was waiting for me, and then afterward in the boarding school you hated so, and making your own start in New York, going about to the theatres and offices and studios—with this day and this hour coming closer and closer—you seem still to be mine: my Dory, yesterday and to-morrow and always!

"I see you always as the same little person, with your *café-au-lait* hair," he added, as Dory, resting against his shoulder, did not speak. "Your *café-au-lait* hair, and the way you set your feet down; you did it when you were a baby, I know, and you'll do it when you're a nut-brown, round-eyed little old woman—and you're always nobody's but *mine!*"

"I was a horrible little fool years ago. I'd hate to think I was always to be that," Dory presently said sombrely.

"How do you mean you were a little fool? You seem to me as wise and self-possessed as a grandfather."

"Oh, but really I'm not."

"Oh, but really you are. What did you ever do that was silly?"

"Lots of things, Jerdy darling," her little voice said somewhat faintly from his shoulder.

"Loving me included?"

"Oh, Jerd, if you knew how I love you!"

"That sounded like a long nail being drawn right out of your heart."

"It was, I believe."

"Don't you *want* to love me?"

"I've always wanted to love somebody, every inch of me, every ounce of me—till I was drowned and smothered and knocked senseless——"

Jerd made no comment. After a moment she felt his kiss on the top of her bare head.

"Jerdy, you big baby, you're snivelling!" And she took her wisp of handkerchief out from the pocket of her little homespun suit and gently and carefully touched his eyes, as he drove, kneeling up on the seat beside him the better to do it.

Then she settled back in her own place, and they talked along sensibly—about storing some of the wedding presents, but using plenty of them, too. Jerd hated worrying about things like spoons, and Dory said she had never had any real silver before, but she was sure she wouldn't worry about it. They talked about Christmas, and the party they would give the big family over at the Cottage. They talked about books, and about plays, and about Jerd's little cabin in the Santa Cruz mountains, where they would go next summer.

"It would be a wonderful place to go for about a month, after your operation, Jerd."

"It's cold."

"Oh, we'd have fires. And I'd cook for you, Jerdy."

"Of course it's the most beautiful mountain top in the world," he said wistfully.

"Books?"

"Books? Nothing else! The cabin is right on the crest in a clearing between redwoods. Lower down there's a bridge over a creek, and a foreman's cottage, bigger than mine, and cows and chickens——"

"Yours, Jerd? The cows and all?"

"Ours, madam."

"And would they bring us up eggs, could we go for milk?"

"We could."

"But then," said Dory, with a sigh of exquisite felicity, "I don't care what we do."

They drove along silently, between mountains and sea, on a scented road softly shrouded with warm mist, through which the inquiring horn of an occasional motor car sounded only like the plaintive, questioning note of a larger bird, veering at them through the mist, disappearing again into a vague world that was peopled only by themselves.

When they were dining Jerd said suddenly, "It must be darned funny, for a woman, to have a man chase across the continent just to ask her to marry him, and to have to turn him down. It must hurt a fellow terribly. Why, just to be thrown down on an invitation kind of dashes you——"

The next day, while they were loitering through Santa Barbara, he burst forth again, "Darn it, I hope he gets married, if all the girls are as crazy about him as you think they are!"

"Who? Bruce?" Dory said, with her heart giving a sick little twinge at his persistent recurrence to the subject.

"Yes."

"Did I say that all the girls were crazy about him?"

"Didn't you?"

"Well, yes, he's popular. He's handsome, don't you think?"

"Sure."

"And you hope he gets married?"

"You heard me."

Dory laughed, and Jerd laughed, too.

"Don't worry, he will!" Dory said.

The bright honeymoon days rushed by, and they were back home again, established in the Cottage, really sharing those terrace breakfasts of which they had dreamed, really accepted by the world as young Mr. and Mrs. Penfield—not miracles or surprising or strange any more, just two persons who were married, and taken for granted. Dory gathered white violets and kept a silver bowl on Jerd's desk brimming with them; she consulted Kate as to pork and beans—which beans came out fat and brown and squashy?

The Judge and Mrs. Penfield dined with them, and everything was awful; Jerd gave his father a hard little slippery drumstick, and his mother the neck of the chicken, and Dory sat writhing in agony over mushy ice cream, and queer, cool, stale bakery rolls. And the next night Thurston and Rhoda came over, inviting themselves, and Dory's provoking maid had cornbread and creamed chicken stew and tomato jelly and everything delicious, and served it all beautifully.

Dory loved her new name and her new estate; she loved to walk with Rhoda and Mrs. Penfield to tea parties, as the winter came on, and have people look at her kindly, and laugh, and say, "Oh, is this Jerd's wife?"

She loved to be at home in the big house, another daughter there, running upstairs to Granny's room, whis-

pering with Rhoda in the library, discussing Julia, and the boys' schooling, with their mother. She sank completely, proudly, happily into their lives, perfectly satisfied when now and then they betrayed what she knew full well—that they all loved Jerd's little honey-coloured wife.

The sense of exquisite security, after twenty-four years like hers, never left her. It was a daily recurring miracle, to Dory Penfield, that she belonged here, was as firmly intrenched in her own place as the oldest Penfield of them all. No saleswoman, in one of the shops, ever addressed her simply by her new name without causing Mrs. Jeremy Penfield a thrill of sheer pride and delight.

November began to loom over all this charm and happiness like a nightmare. Dory felt her heart contract whenever she thought of the approaching crisis in Jerd's affair; she told herself simply that she could not endure it—she could not see him suffer—she could not bear the suspense of having him gravely ill.

"He needn't be gravely ill, Dory," Rhoda and her mother said. "It's a serious thing, of course, but unless some complication sets in——"

"It will!" Dory said firmly, with such a woebegone little face that the other two women, though far from laughter, had to smile.

Dory and Jerd lunched in San Francisco after a morning when he had been with the surgeons. Meanwhile, Dory had been shopping blindly in a world of pain, not conscious of where she went or what she bought.

The minute she saw his face she knew what was before them, and began to cry, as she sat down at the table, and to look out of the window, busily, to try to hide from him the fact that she was crying.

"They—they—they think it's no better, Jerd?"

"They didn't say that."

"Did—did—did you tell them about the croquet?"

"Yep. Said I'd been feeling unusually spry. But Alan merely said that they'd have to go after it, and it might as well be now."

"I'm so sorry. I'm so ashamed. Don't pay any attention to me. I'll stop," Dory said incoherently, looking out of the window.

"That's all right. I know how you feel."

"As if you didn't have enough, without my making a baby of myself!"

But it was hard to pull herself together; hard to go home with that news to Mother and Granny and Rhoda, all of whom had their own moments of looking out of the window ahead.

Somehow she managed it, and they got through the next two days bravely, and through the last night at the Cottage, with Dory curled in Jerd's arms, in the big red leather chair before the fire, after the Penfields went home, talking—talking—talking, hating to let this day go, and to-morrow begin.

"Dory, nothing's going to happen to me. But if anything should——"

"Please—please don't go on, Jerd. I cannot—I give you my word I cannot—*please*——"

"No, but listen, dear, this is all I want to say. *If* anything happens—which it won't—I want you to think——"

"Jerdy——!"

"I know. But it's only this. Say to yourself, 'If it makes me happy it makes Jerd happy!'"

Dory was silent for a long time. Presently she began to talk quite naturally of an indifferent topic, and the subject of Jerd's operation was not mentioned again. She was her own cheerful, engaging little self for the rest of the eve-

ning, and the next day drove into town with him apparently composed and confident.

They went to the hospital, where the nice big nurse was waiting, in a beautiful plain clean wide room, looking out on a broad avenue and a gray stone church, and Dory unpacked Jerd's bag capably and briskly, and caused the nurse to say that Mrs. Penfield was a regular tonic.

The doctor came in and Jerd was established in bed, looking handsome and serene in his new blue silk wrapper, and Judge and Mrs. Penfield came in, and everything was as cheerful as possible. The Penfields went home at eight o'clock, but Dory, although presently banished from Jerd's room, slept at the hospital. She talked with the nurses in the evening, in a hot bright little diet kitchen, and helped one nurse to turn a patient in bed, and inspected a pulpy baby only a few minutes old, with awe and admiration.

Jerd slept well, but the night for Dory was quietly sleepless; the oblong of light from a street lamp fell upon her plain white wall, and she watched it until the dawn dimmed it. At seven, outside his door, she heard Jerd's voice, and went in to him, not to leave him again until they took him upstairs at quarter past eight. By this time the elder Penfields were there again, and Rhoda and Thurston downstairs, although he did not know it.

"You must be starving, you poor thing."

"Not a bit of it. I slept well and I feel fine."

"Dory, have any breakfast?"

"Oh, long ago. The nurse on night duty and I had our coffee together."

"Well, this is the last lap, Dory."

"I know it, Jerdy. And it's such a relief to be facing it at last."

"You know you've got to count on a rotten day or two?"

"Or a rotten week or two But they won't last forever."

At the last second, at the surgery door, bending over him, small and sweet and infinitely desolated, all of a sudden, she faltered, "I love you so, Jerd!" and he took the memory of her misted blue eyes and tumbled soft fair hair, the memory of her brown fingers' desperate grip, with him into the void.

After that the Penfields waited in a hospital bedroom opposite his own door. The nurse came down from the operating room to say that they had been a little late beginning, and that Mr. Penfield had taken the anæsthetic wonderfully. Then there was a halt.

The winter sunshine shone brightly into the room, and outside in the avenue street cars and motors came and went briskly, blowing horns and jarring bells. A radiator clanked, and from beyond closed doors somewhere a voice in pain was heard on a long "ah-h-h!" and was still.

Mrs. Penfield sat on a small upright hospital chair, frankly unable to do anything but wait. The Judge ranged the small quarters restlessly; Thurston on the bed fitfully turned the rustling pages of magazines; Rhoda, beside him, tried to keep a conversation going, or rather to revive the constantly expiring conversation, but it was no use. Dory stood at the window, very still.

"Silly of us to have done this, Mother. It'll be days before they really know anything."

"That's what I was thinking, Tom."

Then Dory, nervously, from the window:

"Why does it take so long, do you suppose?"

"They have to go slowly, perhaps. No use hurrying it."

The nurse came in at eleven; Dory, obviously unconscious of what she was doing, seized her.

"Oughtn't he to be down?"

"Oh, my dear, he's been down ten minutes. I thought you knew. He's back in his own bed."

"Now? And conscious?"

"Conscious?" the nurse echoed, with that offended air her profession so easily assumes under the questions of the uninitiate. "He'll not be conscious for another hour."

No, and another after that. It was so slow!

It was three o'clock in the afternoon before Dory, seated near his bed, as quiet, as frightened, and helpless as a little bird in a snare, saw heavy intelligence in his beloved eyes, robbed now of all their philosophy and laughter.

He could not even smile at her; he sank back into the rolling dark. He was sleeping, at four, and at six, and at ten, and at midnight. Dory heard the nurse telephoning the doctor, saw another doctor come in, in the dark middle of the night, saw the nurses' faces.

"I think I knew it would be like this," she said in a whisper to somebody, her hand clutched tight over her heart. It was all like the rôle in some play that she had known she must fill: the whispers, the alarmed eyes, the quick yet noiseless movements of the staff.

She had known that she must kneel beside Jerd, like this, in this horrible room, known that she must hold his cold hands in her own, and call to him.

"Do you see any response, Mrs. Penfield?"

"No. Jerd, dear, this is Dory."

She looked up at the doctor.

"He stirred his fingers——"

They took her out of the room. Mrs. Penfield was quite silent; the Judge was weeping.

"What are they doing to him?"

"Transfusion. They say he has a chance."

Jerd: her eyes, her soul where full of him. Jerd lying

sunk and gray faced and unconscious, breathing stertorously through an open mouth and purple lips. Sweat on his forehead, and the odour of anæsthetic and antiseptics heavy about him.

"What time is it?"

"Quarter to two."

"Presently it will be next week," thought Dory. "The days can't stop moving."

Children were running along Broadway to school in winter sunshine, coated and sweatered children, their voices ringing out like birds' calls. St. Brigid's bell rang heavily for a ten-o'clock funeral; noon whistles sounded over the sparkling sunshiny city. And Jerd still lived—Jerd still lived.

"Mrs. Penfield, couldn't you lie down for a while and get some sleep? You'll only make yourself sick, too."

"Truly, I don't feel in the least tired."

"Have you had any lunch?"

"I had—I had something this morning; nothing now."

Her wrist watch, her fountain pen, her rings, her furs, all reminded her of Jerd. She could not look at them. Dory's throat felt dry and hard, her head ached dully.

Nothing to do but wait. Nothing to do but wait. Dory and the old Judge walked around the block two or three times, and he told her about old real estate values; showed her a magnificent apartment house whose site had once changed hands for one hundred and forty dollars. They saw an endearing little chocolate-brown Pekingese fussily guarding a magnificent motor car, and when they came back they told the others about the saucy little dog and his spirit.

Alive. Alive. And darkness coming down. Another night.

"Mrs. Penfield?"

"Yes!" And she was on her feet, the world reeling dizzily about her.

"He seems to be almost conscious, and the doctor thinks if you'd just be near him."

And this time, in Jerd's dimly lighted room, she could see a faint shadow of his own smile on the ravaged face, and that the colourless lips were forming words.

"Stick 'round—sweetheart."

She sank down on her knees, her eyes luminous and smiling, her face quite composed, her fingers warm about his own.

"I won't go away again, Jerdy."

Then afterward, in the following dawn, the delight of a hot bath and a careful toilet, the deliciousness of coffee and rolls, the humble thankfulness with which she could meet the day. It was a day in which her shoulders ached steadily, and her knees were sore, from the strain of that long kneeling vigil beside him; a day on which sunshine and noon whistles and running children seemed newly created, filled with the enchantment of utter novelty and interest.

And these days, flying in their turn, crisply sunny and sweet, under high blue skies across which galleons of clouds were moving, were the most exquisite Dory's life had ever known. She brought Jerd home for Thanksgiving, and he could sit in the garden, in the hot, still afternoons, among the late roses, and watch the croquet games, and listen to his mother's and his grandmother's even river of inexhaustible conversation. He could ask for his drawing board and pencils, and work over culverts and bridges during the chilly mornings, while his study fire snapped and crackled; and he and Dory could share evenings of exquisite felicity and quiet over books and talk. On Christmas Day he

limped over to the big house without his crutch for the first time; Dory, in her hungry lonely life, had never conceived of anything so warmly, deliciously heart-satisfying as that Christmas Day.

The Penfields staged it magnificently, in wreaths of evergreen and pointed huckleberry and holly, they dressed for it, they shared the responsibility for the feast. Presents were on all sides, the great tree was embedded in boxes and bundles. Cousins arrived from various points and added their own contributions to the general heap.

It appeared that a long walk and a picnic lunch were a part of the regular programme, up through the farm buildings and the higher prune orchard, and into the rolling oak country of the hills. Jerd could not walk, but Dory drove him and the lunch to the appointed place, and they sat on young grass—for there had been early rains—and even found dandelions and poppies and buttercups in sheltered spots.

With that astounding dexterity and matter-of-factness for which the Penfields were conspicuous a grill appeared, chops sizzled on it, rolls were toasted, and the big coffee pot sent its warming fragrance up into the clear sunny air. Jerd sat on a rug, with his back comfortably braced against a sun-warmed rock, and looked off at the panorama of hills and valleys falling away beneath him in every direction, and watched the scattering of the clan; the girls in bright sweaters and brief skirts, their shadows and cloud shadows moving over the green, green grass.

Late that night, when she had taken off her Christmas earrings, and set a Christmas photograph of Rhoda in a conspicuous position on her desk, and lighted Christmas candlesticks on her dresser, and wound her Christmas clock, and ranged other Christmas gifts neatly on the hall table for proper segregation to-morrow, Dory sat down

on the edge of Jerd's bed and put her hand on his and said, with an odd shining light in her eyes,

"But you know you've another present coming, Jerd."

"Help!" Jerd said faintly, expectantly.

"You get it," said Dory, "in mid-July."

He looked at her a minute without speaking. Then he put aside the book in which his fingers were still keeping place and laid his hand over hers.

"Dory!"

"Yes, it's true."

"My God!" Jerd said in a whisper. And Dory knew it was a prayer.

"It's true."

"Dory, my darling! My little old sweetheart. How long have you known it?"

"I suspected it before you went to the hospital. And then I thought I'd keep it for a Christmas surprise."

"Dory! *Ours*, eh?"

"Ours."

He breathed hard for a few seconds, his eyes never leaving hers.

"My darling," he whispered. "You're glad?"

"I was scared when you were so ill, Jerd. But I'm beginning to be terribly glad."

Jerd reflected, his eyes shining.

"For us to have a baby, Dory! It seems the queerest thing!"

"It seems strange to me."

"As if nobody ever had a baby before."

"That's the way it seems to me, too."

"I know. Won't it be the funniest thing to have people ask us, 'How's the baby?'"

"Oh, and all its little clothes, Jerd, airing around in

places, and a high chair—and naming it—and having it all for our own—like little Mary——"

"Gee," Jerd said boyishly, "I hope it's as cute as Mary."

"It'll be much cuter than Mary," Dory said loftily.

So little Mrs. Penfield, a familiar figure now in the college town, in her furs, with the invariable white violets, didn't attend field days and teas any more, as the spring came along, and in late March Jerd and Dory went up to the cabin in the Santa Cruz mountains, and walked about the forest trails, under redwoods, madrone and oak trees together, her step as slow as his own, now.

They sat on logs, among the trembling green leafy sweetness of the new foliage, with brown spotted mission bells and red columbine all about them, and Jerd's Airedale at their feet, and listened to the rushing of the brook, and the calls of larks and forest birds, and were content. Mrs. Hooker, from the farm, sent them up rolls and pies and gingerbread, and Dory fried broilers and cooked asparagus better than Jerd had ever known either to be prepared before, and little Too Fah washed dishes and sang to himself in the lingering twilights. The fruit blossoms fell, and the leaves thickened, and a real summer shadiness began to spread itself among the white-washed trunks of the orchard trees. Dory filled bowls with blue delphinium and starry Shasta daisies, and dreamed only of a small white belted figure running sturdily about in all this sweetness and greenness when another spring or two should have come and gone, with the birds and the bees making her first little world a heaven, and the sunshine dappling the little yellow head of another Mary.

"Only she can't be Mary. Too many Marys!"

"What was your mother's name, Dory?"

"Theodora—like me."

"Then why not Theodora, shortened to Teddy? It's cute."

"It seems such a formidable name to land on a scrap of a baby."

"It fits you."

"Let's wait and see if it fits her, Jerdy. She might take after her father, and be long and leggy and big-boned."

"If she's only like her little ma!" Jerd said.

CHAPTER XIII

THEN it was Dory's turn to walk slowly into the same hospital room, and smile gallantly at the same kindly nurse, and descend, as Jerd had descended, into the valley of the shadow. Another long afternoon—this time a windy, gritty, foggy afternoon—wore away, and another twilight fell, and Dory was still moving restlessly about, her joking quenched, her courage gone, her beauty battered into paleness, dishevelment, and utter weariness.

They lighted lights in the hospital, and odours of soup and chops went through the halls, and other persons went about their business quietly, but to Dory the world rocked and blazed, and the clocks stood still.

Even later, even when spent and bloodless she was back in her own bed, there seemed to be none of that placid triumph that she had been promised, that she had expected. She slept briefly, feverishly, she awakened to headache and nausea and pain, her heart beat fast and anxiously. Jerd was beside her in the exquisite early morning light.

"They tell me you didn't sleep well, sweetheart."

"No, I couldn't. What time is it, Jerd?"

"It's almost six. What's worrying you, Dory?"

"Oh, Jerdy, I don't know. My head—and I feel so hot—and I feel so weak. And if anything happened to me, Jerd, who'd look out for him——"

"You mustn't begin to cry, darling. You're doing splendidly, and he is perfectly magnificent. Everyone is talking about you and your baby, and Mother's having cards engraved for you——"

"I know, Jerd, but something might happen, you know. Tell her not to send out cards until we're sure——"

"Why, this isn't like you, sweetheart. You ought to be the happiest mother in the world."

"She'll be all right as soon as she's had her face washed, and had some breakfast," the nurse said bracingly, unsympathetically. "And afterward, if she's a good girl, she can have a caller."

"I could be dying, and she wouldn't know it," Dory muttered rebelliously, when the woman had left the room. "She hasn't the faintest idea of nursing——"

But her tearful eyes filled with a sort of reluctant laughter when the baby, portentously worried and preoccupied, was brought in for his mother's inspection.

"Jerd, isn't he ridiculous! Look at the frowns, and working his mouth that way! Is he Tom, or is he Jerry?"

"The Eighteenth Amendment means nothing to you—I see that."

"He looks so pulpy! Can you imagine him hard and sunburned, playing tennis? There he goes, wriggling his legs loose again. Jerd, does he scare you a little? Are they always spotty like this, do you suppose?"

"Great Allah, look at him yawn!"

"Oh, he's so bored!"

"He not only looks drunk, but he has a perfectly insulting expression in his eyes. Open your eyes!"

"Feel his fingers grip. Hang on, old boy."

"How's the head feel now, Mrs. Penfield?"

"Oh, clear as a bell. The coffee did it, I think."

"If you could take a rest now, and perhaps some sleep, I'd fix you up later."

"Could Mr. Penfield sit here?"

"If he wants to."

Jerd held her hand; she went blissfully to sleep. She

roused, and it was a summer mid-morning, with foghorns droning on the bay. Dory sank off to rest again, after a murmured observation regarding "Jerry."

"Can you see him in dark blue rompers, with a white belt around his fat little tum, Jerdy?"

"Dory, I'm scared, I'm so rich."

"And it's over," she whispered, with shut eyes. "Oh-h-h! this time yesterday!" breathed Dory, with a shudder.

The room was orderly, airy, and silent; hospital sounds penetrated it but dimly; Dory slept.

Jerd was gone when she waked up; the baby was apparently not worrying anyone especially. Dory regarded attentively the working, distressed little face on her small arm.

It seemed perfectly incredible that the world took the tremendous business of having a baby so comfortably for granted. Why, her whole cosmic scheme had turned itself upside down since she had walked into this hospital yesterday morning. She had managed to survive it, to crawl to shore through breakers, rocks, and tempest somehow, but she was flattened out into helplessness, pain, and weakness—and she ought to be doing things for the baby! He might die, off in that hospital nursery, and she couldn't stop it.

However, her head had stopped aching, and she had had some sleep, and flowers and congratulations were arriving. The Judge and Mrs. Penfield peeped into the room, and Dory felt touched and ashamed at the expression on their faces, and decided to stop fussing, and live up to the great position of the Boy's Mother. And the baby came back for a good-night visit, and Jerd came in at the same time, sitting almost invisible in the dusk, while Dory lay looking down her own slim lax arm at the little sausage roll that had changed all the values of life.

"Dad is simply out of his senses."

She raised long lashes thoughtfully.

"I'm so glad he's pleased."

"Pleased! And Rhoda! And Mary! But then everyone's wild with excitement."

"You're a celebrity, Jerry," Dory said to her first-born.

"He's Jerry, is he?"

"Yes. He's junior. Jerd, the Cottage really is too small for us now. We'll have to build on a wing for this young man."

"Dory, isn't it the limit? Yesterday morning no child at all, and now we speak of 'the baby.'"

"The baby!" She said it with a long sigh of pleasure.

"Feeling pretty comfortable now?"

"Oh, marvellous. Only every time I doze I think it hasn't happened, and that I'm lying on the couch at home, waiting."

"It was some party!" the man muttered, with a reminiscent shudder.

"It wasn't so terrible," the woman said dreamily.

"How life carries us along," Jerd continued, suddenly out of a deepening happy silence. "Your coming to California at all was the miracle of this time last year. Then our marriage, and that honeymoon—why, it seems scarcely to be over! Then my party, and you standing by me—and somehow that seemed to marry us all over again, seemed to double what we felt to each other. And then, right on top of all that—this young feller."

"Jerd, if you could know how love for this little lump-of-nothing tears at my heart."

"I know. Same thing here."

"He lies beside me," said Dory, "not knowing anything, not doing anything for me—not caring. And, Jerd, I could die for him."

"I know, sweetheart."

"That warm little flannelly smell they have——"

She drew the baby up against her cheek, and he awakened, and emitted an acid cry. The nurse lighted a light and put her fingers on Dory's wrist.

"Doesn't he get anything to eat?"

"Not until to-morrow—maybe next day. Maybe a little water now."

"And does he take it?"

"Take it! You ought to hear him smack his lips!"

"Patience, boy," Dory admonished him, as the sausage was borne away on an arm of the big nurse. She and Jerd sat on talking for another wonderful half hour. "'The cup brimmeth over,'" she quoted, when he stooped to kiss her good-night.

Jerd loved to reach home at dark and come through the rustling leaves of the garden and enter a little square brick house brimming with warmth and laughter, and the sweetness of baking bread, and the drifting scent of white violets, and the voices of Dory and the baby.

The boy had a nursery now, opening through passages and closets into Dory's room; Jerd usually went there first, and found her busy with him, laughing at him, pulling his busily scrambling small body about on the blanket that Kate always spread at this time before the fire.

She would spring up, her honey-coloured hair tumbled, her cheeks red as the baby's cheeks were.

"Oh, Jerdy darling! You're so late! It's quarter past six. And he's been so adorable . . .!"

It was like a man's dream of home-coming, Jerd thought sometimes, as he took her fragrant kiss, and let her eager little hands help him into a big chair, and plant a solemnly staring baby in his arms. Young Jerry had honey-coloured

hair, too, and Dory's round blue eyes, but when he smiled Dory saw in the small face a reflection of Jerd's own wistful smile.

One wild March night, when rain was sluicing down over the world, and when a long consultation had delayed him until dark, he found her in dark blue velvet, with an embroidered collar marking the whiteness of her round throat, and embroidered cuffs setting off her slender wrists and firm, brown little hands. Her cheeks were warm with firelight and laughter as she greeted him.

"Jerd, you're tired."

"No, it was interesting. We're getting somewhere."

"Jerdy, you know I told you that I thought Jerry was *unmistakably* cutting more teeth, and that was the matter with him on Sunday?"

"Yes?"

"Well, see if you can get your finger in there—he's as sensitive as a witch about letting me touch his mouth——"

She was down on the rug with the baby.

"This little fellow has sense," she said; "he has one great big glassy villainous tooth after another, and never says a word to anyone. . . ."

She regarded the fluffy top of little Jerry's head thoughtfully, and after planting a kiss on the back of his neck, where the bright soft hair curled into little damp rings and fish tails, studied his little head again, as if to see the effect.

"Ja," Jerry said.

"And b'da-da, and ja-ja-ja," Dory responded promptly.

She and Jerd began the usual comfortable exchange of daily news.

"I saw Arnold about the pictures, and ordered them."

"Oh, and it was all right about the express box, Jerdy. They brought it this morning."

"Hats come?"

"Oh, yes. I wore the blue one to the college tea this afternoon. It was darling. No, Jerry, don't eat that. That's naughty. Take the train out of your mouth——"

"He actually did it!" Jerd observed amazedly.

"Oh, you ought to see him obey!—Ah, don't cry, darling! Was your mudder mean to her baby?" Dory said, laughing and half crying herself as little Jerry's lip trembled and his eyes widened with slow tears. She gathered him, tumbled and weeping, into her arms, and kissed him back into composure.

Presently, from wild uproar, the baby subsided into a thoughtful silence, his back braced comfortably against his father's chest, a small thumb curled firmly about each of Jerd's big thumbs, firelight shining in his eyes.

"Did you stop at the big house?"

"No, I came straight on."

"Mary's there with little Mary."

"Oh, that's fun."

"Your mother asked me not to tell you until you'd had your dinner," Dory said, "but Rhoda eloped to-day with Alan Perley."

"What!"

"Jerd, you'll frighten him."

"What?" Jerd said again, this time barely audibly.

"Yes. Your mother got a letter sent by messenger from the station at about four o'clock."

Jerd did not speak during a moment of staring bewilderment.

"What'd they want to do it that way for?"

"I don't know. That's what we all say."

"Mother upset?"

"Oh, she's crushed. She says she'd rather Rhoda had died."

"Are they married?"

"We don't *know.* It came like a thunderbolt. Rhoda" It was Dory in a favourite rôle—confidante, companion, adviser to her adored big family—"Rhoda came over here about two," she said, "and I was going downtown, and to see Mary on my way to the tea. Jerry had been out in the barn with Kate until one, and he was asleep, and I had my lunch alone, and then Rhoda came in. She said Stringy had taken the little car and she was going up to San Francisco to spend the night with Maryanne Pembroke. I didn't think anything of it."

"This was when?"

"This was about two. Your mother was in town with Julia, in her car, so Rhoda put her suitcase in mine, and we went over to Mary's, and sat there a while with Mary and the baby."

"How is Mary?"

"Oh, fine. The plaster comes off to-morrow. So then Rhoda," Dory continued, falling into narrative style again, "Rhoda said that she had to go to the bank and cash a check, and we went there just before it closed, and I noticed—I *noticed,*" Dory said, warming, "that she was putting some pretty big bills into her purse—fifties, or at least more than one fifty, but I naturally didn't say anything about it. So we went to the three-eleven—only it's my own impression that she didn't take that train, that she met Alan for the southbound, at three-eighteen. Anyway, she said good-bye, and I came home, and your mother was just here, so I got Jerry and went over to visit with her and Granny——"

"How is Granny?"

"She's all right. The doctor said it was nothing.—And while we were sitting there, a messenger came in with this note. It was Rhoda's hand, and your mother said, 'It's

from Rhoda, that's funny.' So she opened it, and she sort of choked, and I ran to her, and read it aloud, and it just said, 'Dearest Family, Alan and I are going to Hollywood. Don't be mad at me.'"

"Well, I call it disgusting," Jerd said, in strong disapproval.

"Oh, so do I!"

"She's of age, she could have done it decently."

"I know. And yet," Dory said, affectionate lenience in her tone, "she is crazy about him, you have to admit that."

"Crazy is right."

"But here's what sort of breaks me up," Dory, after a moment's reflection, said suddenly; "your mother's always been so wonderful with Rhoda, and your father just worships her. And this is going to hurt and shame them both so terribly. It seems to be so *senseless*."

"I don't get it at all."

"No, neither do I. And since he flunked out of college in January she hasn't been seeing so much of him—or at least I didn't *think* she did—and she's had a lot of other men on the string——"

"Huh!" Jerd said, in a silence, scowling, looking away.

"He's not in love with her, Jerd, any more than a rabbit."

"*I* don't think he is."

"I know he's not."

"Poor kid, she's let herself into something."

"She certainly has."

"They'll get married, I suppose."

"Oh, surely, I'm not afraid of *that*. But the reason I think he doesn't care *that* for her," Dory said, with something of Rhoda's own inconsequential swiftness, "is that when that movie actress was up in town Alan simply

didn't pay any attention to Rhoda at all. He came down here once in that week, and I used to hear her telephoning him, asking what he was doing—and all the while that Lassie Duncan and he were running around together——"

"Poor kid, she's let herself in for it."

"She surely has."

"That big bum, loafing around here without a job, telling everyone what the movies were offering him, borrowing money from you——"

"Trying to."

"Well, if he didn't get it, he probably did from her. Gee, it makes you sick the way women will fall for that sort of sheik——"

"Ah, no, now, he does seem a rotter to us," Dory said placatingly, "but she loves him and he may love her——"

"He doesn't. He loves Alan Montague Perley. What he feels for himself is the grand passion."

"His stage name is going to be Alan Montague," Dory said irrelevantly.

"It sounds like him!"

"Will your father cut off her allowance, Jerd?"

"Why, I don't know. I was thinking about that. It's probably the one thing that could keep him faithful to her, that money every month. They'll live on it."

Dory reflected, pursed lips almost touching Jerry's little head.

"Dory, she'll be all her life getting out of this tangle. If there are children he'll have a strangle hold on her for life."

"Oh, children!" Dory whispered with a shudder, tightening her arms about Jerry, to whom Kate had brought a large, white, warm bottle now, and who was luxuriously consuming its contents, falling on and off into a dreamy doze as he did so.

"Jerd, Jerd, what wouldn't one have to do for one's children!"

"Why, darling, you look quite white," Jerd said, laughing.

"I know. But it's such a frightful weapon to have anyone hold against one—a baby."

"Rhoda isn't as mad about kids as you are."

"Because Rhoda's only a girl. A girl can't know, Jerd. She can't know what it's going to mean before she has them. It isn't fair to threaten their futures to make them unhappy——"

"Rhoda'll get something from Dad, you know. Eighty thousand—maybe more. That is to say, *he'll* get it."

"She may not give it to him."

"She will."

"Yes, I suppose she will."

"We'd better go over to the big house for dinner, Dory."

"I thought so. I told Kate."

There was a silence full of thought.

"What we were saying reminds me of that case in the paper this morning. See it?"

"What—what case was that?"

"You were asleep when I left. It was the case of a girl down near Riverside somewhere—her husband is charging now that she wasn't straight before she married him."

"It didn't say in my paper that she wasn't straight before she married him."

Dory rose cautiously, and without disturbing the baby, carried him to his crib. She and Jerd tiptoed out of the nursery.

"My paper didn't say she wasn't straight, Jerd, poor girl. It said that she had been in love with some boy when she was sixteen or seventeen, and had lived with him as his wife."

"Well, isn't that the same thing?"

"Oh, no! *No.*" Dory turned in the hall, looked determinedly at her husband, shook her head. "The two things are entirely different. A girl can't help falling in love," she argued.

"No, but she can help going the limit."

"This woman in the newspaper story—she's thirty. They've been married ten years, and have three children. She's not the same girl who gave way to her first feeling—her first high-school crush. How could she possibly know then how she'd feel to-day about things? She was only a child. To have him have their marriage annulled—and take her children away from her——"

"Of course it's outrageous," Jerd agreed doubtfully, as Dory paused.

"He must be a beast."

"Henry the Eighth got away with it."

"Henry the Eighth with his lady friends all over the place, having spies and commissioners and court-martials to hunt down some kiss or hug his wife gave a man when she was fourteen——!' '

"Well, if half we hear nowadays is true lots of girls are taking heavy chances."

"Oh, that," said Dory scornfully, "that seems to me perfectly sickening, petting and sitting 'round in motor cars. But really to care for someone—that'd be different, I should think."

They were in their own room now, and she at her dressing table, brushing her bright unruly hair.

"Not to me it wouldn't."

"Jerd," she said, with an easy little reproving laugh, "how can you be so outrageous! Would you have them take that woman's babies away from her if you were the judge, or if you were the husband?"

"No, I mightn't go as far as that. I mightn't go as far as that. But I'd hunt the other fellow down, the man who had taken advantage of her, and put a bullet through him, and you can bet your life on that."

"*That* wouldn't do anyone any good," Dory said composedly.

"It would do me some good."

"If the husband does that he marks himself and his wife and his children for life. It might—" Dory conceded, her head tipped to one side as she studied the effect of her hair arrangement—"it *might* give him some satisfaction. But it wrecks all their lives. Why not, instead, tell himself that if his wife had been a young widow he would have married her just the same? Or indeed, if she had told him he would have married her. As far as I could see from the newspaper, her only fault was in not telling him."

"Well, you make a case there, sweetheart. And yet—isn't there a sort of unwritten law that women shall be pure, and men courageous and honourable and all the rest of it? Of course, men *aren't*," Jerd agreed, thinking aloud. "But just the same you'll find that most women *do* accept the idea of—philandering before marriage on the part of the men they marry, and that men feel terribly strongly about purity in their wives."

"Purity, Jerd! That has nothing to do with purity. Why, there are old maids who have the most disgusting ideas about love——"

"I know." He laughed suddenly. "You're cute," he finished.

"Do you suppose that he told her all the foolishness of *his* past life?" Dory demanded, proceeding to the stage where she had to step into a little blue satin gown that jingled with glass beads.

"No, I don't suppose he did."

"Of *course* he didn't."

"I love that dress."

"I love this dress, too. It's falling apart."

"Dad was speaking about that case to-day—it's aroused a good deal of interest because it's a sort of test case. And he said that there are plenty of states in the Union where that would be a valid cause for annulment."

"Oh, but, Jerd, how outrageous! Why, think what a mother goes through to have her baby! Think how it needs her! It seems to me that this whole business of prying into what happened years ago, and spying, and forgetting how people outgrow even themselves—how different a woman of thirty is from a girl of sixteen, how much we all have to forgive—it belongs to the Dark Ages! It's revenge, and inquisition, and judgment; it's everything hard and horrible."

"But I agree with you, I agree with you," Jerd said, laughing at her vehemence. "You know I told you last week that I didn't believe we'd ever get anywhere in this world until we did away with the very word 'punishment.' We're a pretty poor lot to punish each other, to mete out cells and ropes and locks and bars."

"Then you ought to hope, as I do, that the judge will throw this case out of court, and she'll bring a countersuit, and get an enormous alimony," Dory persisted spiritedly.

"Well, I do, and he will—consider it done," Jerd assured her, laughing again.

"Now that other case in the paper," Dory said, with unabated fervour, "of a man who committed a murder years and years ago—remember?—and went away and reformed and married and had children and got a good job—and with all the trouble there is in the world they have to hunt him down, ferret him out, and take him away

from his wife and children—it was an outrage—and you said so, too, Jerd."

"I know I did!"

"Well——" she said, suddenly deflating, mollified.

"What makes a man care *what* a woman has done before she was his wife?" she demanded, out of a silence.

"Well, jealousy, perhaps."

"Jealousy! Jealousy's nothing but fear!"

"I used to be very jealous," Jerd said, walking toward the big house.

"When we were first married. I know you did!"

"But you've spoiled me out of it."

Dory's little fingers caught at his hand in the dark.

"I love this warm, windy sound of spring in the trees, Jerd. The plum trees back of the croquet court look like popcorn balls!"

"Macgowan is coming out here with a new play, I see," Jerd said, with a careless air.

"Bruce Macgowan? Is he?"

"According to the papers. To Los Angeles, anyway."

"Oh, well, Los Angeles isn't us. But I hope he does come up, I'd like him to see the baby," Dory said, after a moment's thought. Presently she added, "I like you to be jealous of me, Jerd."

"Is that so?"

"Yes, because it proves that you love me."

"And I suppose you're lying awake nights worrying about my not loving you?"

"A woman," said Dory, "likes to be reassured about her husband's affection, every hour, on the hour."

"Why, I believe this little baggage loves me," Jerd said tenderly.

For answer she stopped him at the side door where the mellow light from the pantry was streaming out and ming-

ling with the dusk that was barely dark, and drew his tall head down to her own, and locked her arms tightly about his neck, and kissed him, not once but many times.

"Ah, Jerdy, I love you so! I love you so! You're the only person in the world I love. You'll never know how much I love you," she whispered.

Coming from self-contained little Dory it was so unusual, so unexpected, that Jerd could find nothing to say in reply. He held her tightly against his heart for a long minute. Then they went into the house.

All through the evening the glory of that one exquisitie moment in the garden's darkness, and the sweet wild windy rush of spring airs, remained with Dory, and every time her eyes met Jerd's they shone with an exquisite and mysterious light.

He saw her small, anxious, and concerned among the older persons; saw her her own deliciously giddy self with the curious and awestruck boys and Julia. She made his father and mother come as usual to dinner, and pleaded Rhoda's cause; after all, it wasn't as if Alan had anything disgraceful on his record; after all, it wasn't as if he hadn't been free to marry.

She mounted the stairs to Mrs. Pennoyer's room.

"Please come down, Granny. It's so dismal, it's so gloomy, with you up here."

"My dear, I can't. It isn't that I wun't, it's simply that I can't. These things have a strange effect on me—it really seems as if the young folks of to-day are strangely lackin' in somethin' we had—I can't think it's funny—I can't make a joke of it——"

Dory's eyes strayed to the old yellowed photograph of Great-aunt Annie Sarah on the wall; Annie Sarah, a perfect fountain of ringlets, with striped silk ruffles flowing down in masses about her feet, and a coquettishly tipped saucer

hat shading her bright eyes. Great-aunt Annie Sarah had run away with a naval lieutenant.

But Dory didn't allude to her; she guided the old lady downstairs after a while, and they all managed a farcical sort of dinner, and afterward went into Mrs. Penfield's upstairs sitting room and talked of Rhoda. Mary and Edward came in, and Dory observed that Edward's somewhat fluctuating stock had gained strength and stability from Rhoda's action.

She felt most sympathy for the old Judge, stricken in his heart of hearts, by the child he had spoiled and favoured for twenty years. He listened to them all; he did not speak. Mrs. Penfield's eyes often went to him anxiously.

Dory sat on a hassock beside his chair, but she did not attempt to win him to speak; she did not even touch the tired old hand that hung close to her shoulder. But when there was any blame of Rhoda she defended her, and she knew it was not imagination that made her feel that the Judge knew it, and was grateful.

Mary was full of helpful expedients; the older women seemed dazed and helpless. The boys listened sleepily, stealthily opened their detective stories. Julia was utterly out of sympathy with the spirit of the meeting, and was early dismissed.

At nine o'clock an unsigned telegram arrived by telephone.

"Married at five in San José," it said, "much love to all."

And as it was retailed to her Mrs. Penfield gave a deep groan.

"It's like losing Rhoda. She'll never come back."

"Oh, yes, she will, Mother," Jerd said. "We all have."

"But she won't. No, she's chosen her own road——"

Dory looked respectfully, sleepily, at the portraits over

the mantel, and the familiar photographs and books. There was a beautiful picture of Tom on his mother's desk, a handsome big seventeen-year-old who looked like a broader and fatter Jerd. Dory had heard the story of that fatal day at the lake many times, but since her own boy's birth it had taken on a new significance. In the place of Tom the second, now, she saw Jerry the second, little fat baby Jerry, cutting his teeth. Jerry out on the blue shining relentless water, and she standing helpless, paralyzed, on the porch of the cabin on the shore. Tom the second had waved to his mother—smiled reassuringly at her—gone under——

"What scared you, darling?" It was her father-in-law, roused from his sorrowful preoccupation by her sudden start and jump.

"Just thinking," Dory said, with a bright upward glance from blue eyes under her tawny mop.

"Thinking——?"

"That—the minute you have a child—you put your happiness into the hands of that child." She elucidated it a little uncertainly.

"Worth it, my dear," he assured her kindly, with a sigh.

His hand was reaching for hers now; she grasped it.

"Oh, worth it!" she echoed fervently.

"Little boys running upstairs and sliding down—little girls with clean gingham aprons—and secrets—and all their dolls arranged in a corner of their rooms," the old Judge said slowly. "It's worth while, isn't it, Mother?"

"I suppose so," Mrs. Penfield said, on the verge of tears.

"I used to like to walk downtown with the little girls, Dory. Mary and Rhoda, all fresh and clean, and chattering——"

"Oh, and the picnics!" Dory said eagerly.

"Picnics, yes—brown little boys and girls scattered all over Pebble Beach——"

"Well, we've got one little girl and two little boys with whom to start a fresh lot of Christmases and picnics," Jerd said encouragingly. "Dory and I mean to go right on with it—Porter, Jerry, and Mary, and whatever other small fry accrue to the family in the next few years——"

Suddenly Dory's voice spoke in a dreaming stillness; spoke with a strange authority and a sort of aching sweetness.

"I wish you could all know, you Penfields, what it means to outsiders, to people who haven't had any family life—any running up and downstairs before dinner, and table games, and croquet, and lessons, and even scarlatina——"

"It didn't mean much to Rhoda!" Mrs. Penfield said as she paused.

"It did! It meant as much to Rhoda as to any of us," Mary took it up eagerly.

"Perhaps more than she knows," Jerd's pleasant voice added. Mrs. Penfield began to cry quietly, and the old man took out his handkerchief and wiped his eyes. Mrs. Pennoyer was heard to observe that she would like to get hold of that feller Perley and "boot him."

At eleven o'clock Dory and Jerd walked home and looked at their sleeping boy and talked long and seriously as they made their preparations for the night. For the first time the responsibility of the family tradition impressed both, and their future as that family's probable head.

"If anything ever happens to Mother, Dory, we'll have to go over to the big house, you and I. And if anything ever happens to Dad—I mean years from now—you and Mother will have to swap houses. Mary'll always need

someone to run her affairs, for Edward's no business man, and she knows it—and then there's Julia's wedding, and Porter, and the boys and their wives—and perhaps Rhoda coming home with a couple of kids—— It isn't all roses, you know, sweetheart."

"I wouldn't want it to be, Jerdy! I'm like the child out yachting, I don't care, as long as the times we go up are one more than the times we go down. I love to feel they need us—they want us—in a time like this, just as much as at Christmases and birthdays. It couldn't be always just fun. But it's my job," said Dory, with shining, reminiscent eyes, "it's what I want to do."

"Being torn every which way by a large and unregenerate gang!"

"No. Being young Mrs. Penfield, Jerd Penfield's wife, and mother of the Penfield baby. Being in on everything —right at the source——"

"I wasn't born lucky, or anything," Jerd said reflectively.

"Nor I," Dory returned fervently. She went over to his reading chair and dispossessed him of his book and settled her little person comfortably in his lap.

"If you could know the *security* of this, Jerd," she murmured, resting her soft little mop against his cheek, locking an arm about his neck, hiding her face contentedly, like a child, in his neck.

CHAPTER XIV

ONLY a day or two later, while Peninsula society was still marvelling at the strange marriage of Judge Penfield's pretty second daughter, a letter arrived for Dory in a handful of other mail.

Not a letter exactly, either; only an envelope containing a newspaper clipping. It was a clipping of an editorial about the case of the woman whose husband wished to have their marriage annulled for pre-marital indiscretions.

Jerd had gone to town when the mail arrived; he was deep in consultation with some Canadian and English engineers, who were engaged in a bridge-building plan. He went away right after breakfast in these days and returned only a little while before dinner; an unwonted state of affairs for Dory, who said that she felt as if she had "a real husband."

She stood looking at the smeared cheap hotel envelope that had enclosed the clipped editorial, and at the newspaper strip itself, and her soul turned sick within her.

After a while she read the editorial. It was rather in favour of the husband.

"Mutual confidence is the basis of true married happiness," said the article. "If either wife or husband feels that there are secrets unsuspected between them their relationship is subtly altered. Many a woman is willing to overlook, and does overlook, the prenuptial sex experience of a husband. But a husband may feel entirely different on this point. It may be insufferable to him to entertain the idea that some other man, perhaps an acquaintance or associate, has previously stood in his

relationship to the woman he loves. In any case it is his right to know. The importance of frankness . . ."

Dory finished the article, and swallowed with a dry throat. She took article and envelope to the nursery fire, and burned them.

The March day was rapidly warming into real summer sweetness, but the baby's bath was under way; he could not wait upon the weather. Kate had a fire, and was warming his simple clothes before it, while Jerry squirmed, swarmed, and crawled about in a white pen, gabbling to his white and brown animals—a small busy animal himself. His fast-receding shirt and pinned lower garment allowed his round firm little bare legs and round firm little bare arms free play; his sunny head was bare. He gasped, panted, wrought mightily, shouted.

"I've never seen him so wild," said Kate.

Dory tied on a big apron and seized the child. Jerry looked up at her mysteriously, showed his specks of new glassy teeth in a smile, rolled happily upon his back on her lap. He writhed himself into incredible convolutions, and Dory had to untangle his tenacious little legs and fists from her scarf, her hair, her nose, the edge of her apron, and all the soap and powder boxes and strings of safety pins with which this hour was always diverted.

"Let it go, Jerry! Give it to Mummy——

"Did he finish his cereal, Kate? I had to take Mr. Penfield to the train——

"Who could have sent it! Who could have sent it? . . . I know that handwriting! It was Wally Oliver!"

The horror of it stayed with her. She went out to the sand box and sent Kate in to clear up the nursery. Jerry in his white sweater scrambled busily in the white warm sand. He gravely gripped the side of a gay wooden bucket and scowled portentously at a threatening world.

"Jerry, give it to Mother. That's not your bucket, that's Mary's. Give it to Mother."

Her heart ached sharply, suffocatingly. Little boys needed their mothers—needed to have faith in their mothers. . . .

To have any other woman answering his questions—drying his tears—decreeing that he should eat this—play with that. . . .

Dory shook herself as if rousing herself from a bad dream. The sun was shining warmly now, mists were rising from the shady places under the big spreading limbs of the oaks, and on the rise of orchard hill, off to the east, the plum trees stood like round white balls of popcorn. Larks were rising and calling; Dory heard the kitchen clock strike a swift, even ten.

Over at the big house windows were open, and white curtains fanning gently in and out. Rhoda might run away and get married, and Mary break her wrist, and Thurston flunk in his physics course, but life for the Penfields must go on. Flora was setting bread and mixing mayonnaise, Julia had run off to school, Stringy was as much interested in his camera work as ever, and Nora was airing beds and arranging flowers.

By this time Mrs. Penfield, heavy and impressive, and sighing deeply, in her dark blue silk gown, had mounted up to her mother's room, and while the old lady enjoyed her breakfast tray and her newspaper, the two would mournfully reconsider all that affected Rhoda. And presently the daughter would drive her mother downtown, and they would meet friends, and say, with all the Penfield philosophy and courage, that Rhoda's marriage had been very sudden, because Mr. Perley had had an opportunity to take a good position down South. They would order the engraved cards upon which Judge and Mrs. Thomas Paul

Penfield would announce the marriage of their daughter, Rhoda Pennoyer to Mr. Alan Montague Perley.

Dory's eyes followed the gracious line of the big house, mansard roof and vine-wrapped chimneys, and wandered on, through the lacing tops of the great trees, across the lane beyond which lay the croquet and tennis courts, up past the white-washed fences and towering poplars of "Pony Wait," and so to the stables and barns, all interspersed on this soft spring morning with the bursting young green of fruit trees and willows and peppers, and dappled with sunshine.

Behind it all lay the dramatic back drop of the mountains, hazy blue, climbing up behind each other in rolling lines, mounting almost invisibly into the faintly paler sky. Her kingdom. Jerd's grandfather had built it, and some day Jerd's grandsons would be proud to claim it; it was home. The books, the fires, the pictures, the familiar window seats and doorways, the roses and daisies, the green vistas of fences and lawns, under oaks and elms, all were home to Dory now. Shelves of home-labelled jellies and jams down in the big, cement-scented basement; Miss Alcott's books on Julia's shelves, as they had been on Mary's and Rhoda's before her; games—arguments—sickness—health—Mother patiently demanding whose rubbers these were right in the centre of the hall—Stringy acidly returning to his dinner with the request that Julia's darned friends choose some other hour for telephone communication regarding paper dolls—Flora aghast that them electricians turned off her ice box and forget to connect it again . . .

All home. And home, just as much, the times when they all went away, packing themselves into cars, agitated over bathing suits and sweaters and thermos bottles. Brown boys and girls, the Judge had said, scattered over beaches,

begging for another hour of play—another swim—another ice-cream cone.

Three of them married now—Jerd and Mary and Rhoda. And the new generation of cribs and sand buckets, picnics and Christmas stockings, was coming along. More staggering fat babies scattering food for baby chickens, more ponies, shaking their little tasselled heads at "Pony Wait," more brown children wading in running arcs of surf, screaming over croquet.

She separated Jerry from a struggling puppy and handed it to Kate, and dried Jerry's tears by calling his attention to her own startling achievements with sand, moulded by the bucket into little castles, all in a row. The baby sat with his thumb in his mouth, and tears drying on his round red cheeks, and stared at the castles, enraptured.

Suddenly Dory was twenty-one again, and back in New York, alone—no father, no mother to care what a little tawny-headed girl did with herself or her heart. An actress—this was the happy, confident time of playing Nessa, in "Goldenrod."

She saw Broadway, on a snowy night, with all the lights shining, and all the people's feet tramping the dry snow into brown sugar along the sidewalks. She smelled grease paint, and saw her own small, pale, strained face mirrored in a cruel blazing circle of lights as she put on powder and rouge. And Bruce Macgowan was waiting for her, again.

It had seemed so utterly unimportant, then; the world too big and busy and self-absorbed to bother itself with the actions of one small girl. Her young fresh love for Bruce, the strangely thrilling charm the dark, quiet young fellow had held for the little actress, had coloured all that spring with secret magic.

Secret, because they had told nobody, nobody had suspected. Nobody—except Wally Oliver, perhaps. The

"Goldenrod" company had been sent out on the road, and Dory with it, and during those months on the road some change had come over her spirit; she had come back loving Bruce no less, but changed, ignoring—apparently forgetting—those weeks of madness, making no allusion to them, evading his embrace, holding herself to herself once more.

And Margaret, his unfortunate young wife, had had one of her periodical times of being better, just then, so that he had been seriously concerned with the dreadful responsibility of her return. Bruce and Dory had gone back warmly to affectionate friendship almost without explanation or effort; the brief interval of passion had passed like a dream.

It was a dream from which Dory felt herself now awakening to the sick realization of cold and chilly daylight. One couldn't take a part of one's life like that, and fold it up, and put it aside. It lived—everything that ever had been lived forever, a part of her—a part of the scheme—a cause that would have its effect like every other cause.

Whatever her group in New York suspected, and they were not a suspicious or curious crowd, it was only Wally Oliver who had any real ground for suspicion. When Dory remembered why her mouth and throat grew dry, and she shuddered from head to foot. Such a little chance, and so unnecessary, and so entirely unimportant—if it had not been for the truth behind it!

Just at the end of the "Goldenrod" run she had returned from an overnight stay in Boston, reaching New York early on a Monday morning, a bleak, cold, forbidding Monday morning at about seven o'clock. And to her pleased surprise Bruce had met her at the station and proposed that she come up to breakfast at his studio. Dory pleading train fatigue and grime, he had reminded her

that she could make herself fresh and dainty before breakfast if she liked.

So they had gone to the studio, and Bruce had been anxiously, almost vexedly telling her of the developments in the case of Margaret, and Dory had been listening with a stricken face, when Wally Oliver had sauntered in, to beg a breakfast, and ten dollars.

The money he had gotten; the breakfast they had not asked him to share. And afterward Dory had questioned Bruce uneasily as to the supposed impression made on him.

"I brushing my hair!"

"Oh, that was all right. He knew you were just from Boston."

"I know."

"And what if he did suspect something? You and I don't have to be afraid of Wally Oliver, a poor old derelict wandering about borrowing money. It's only for Sonia's sake I do anything for him; he doesn't count. Why, you're a successful actress, and I'm a playwright, and what does he matter?"

But she remembered that an uncomfortable sense of Wally's estimate of the situation had been with her all day; she had had to shake it off, with a little actual tossing of her head.

Just as she was trying to shake it off now. Why, it wasn't credible that a loathsome old loafer like Wally could have the power to come into her life now, come into this world of arching high oak boughs and serene white-washed bricks, and sunshiny windows, this world of bread-baking and music and books and quiet talk, of emergencies joyful and sorrowful, but all protected, and safe, and threaten her peace?

"I'm imagining all this, I'm scaring myself."

But the frightened questions came tumbling over each other just the same.

"What would happen if Jerd knew? What would he do? He'd never love me again. What would I do? I couldn't go on living with him if he didn't love me. I couldn't leave my boy."

Kate was coming toward her between the blossoming lilac and syringa and snowball bushes. The day was hot now; it was eleven o'clock. Kate carried a card in her fingers, and as soon as Dory saw it she knew whose name it bore.

Say I am not here. Say we have all gone away. Say that I am in Los Angeles with Mr. Penfield.

Aloud she said, "Someone for me?"

"A gentleman, Mrs. Penfield. Mr. Oliver, his name is."

"I see." Dory hesitated, frowning faintly. Her heart raced, stopped, raced again. "Does he know I'm here?"

"I said you might be over at the big house, and he said he was staying in town, and he could come this afternoon or to-morrow."

"I see. Well, I'll see him," Dory said.

CHAPTER XV

AGAIN the man's bulk in the tempered spring light of the pleasant room reminded Dory of a spider—a bloated big spider, waiting in the shadows for his prey. She was a little pale when she went in, but she held her head up, and she was smiling faintly.

"Hello, Wally."

"Well, hello, Dory!" She remembered that Mabel had said once that Wally's hand was like a warm poached egg. "You aren't a bit more surprised to see me than I am to be here," said Wally genially.

"I thought you were in New York."

"I was. But I had to come back here. Cough," said Wally, shaking his head seriously.

"And where are you now, and what are you doing, Wally?"

"Well, I'm going to be here for a while."

"In California?" She managed a pleased, surprised inflection. But a wave of cold vertigo shook her inwardly.

"In Palo Alto, prob'ly."

"Here?" Dory felt her throat close completely. She swallowed.

"Right here." His smile invited her to share his stupid, simple air of triumph. "I'm thinking of taking a little place called Rutter's cottage," he told her.

"Rutter's cottage! You mean the little Spanish house with the blue shutters? But—but is Sonia coming out with you, Wally?"

"No, she's still with that wop. They had a little girl."

"They have a baby!" The mother of a baby brightened sympathetically.

"Had. It died. The doctor said Sonia was anæmic to begin with, and the kid had no heart at all, practically."

"Born dead?"

"No, I believe it lived for three months. This was last summer—terrible summer. I never see them."

The agony of it. The agony of having had the little creature, and having to let her go! Dory thought of her sunburned little tramp—his white blanket with pink stripes, his silver bowl, his shining nursery. . . .

And Sonia had fought for her child in the hot streets and burning attic studio, with the lifeless air coming in waves from a brazen sky, and the pavements simmering, and the milk bottles smelling . . .

"But, Wally, will you live all alone?"

"Sure. I may get a Chinese boy to do the work."

"Has he come into some money?" Dory thought wonderingly. The Rutter cottage was modern, expensive; Wally would pay at least seventy-five dollars rent for it.

"How's Mr. Penfield?"

"Oh, very well."

"Had an operation, didn't he?"

"Yes, very serious. We thought it might cost him his leg. But he came out of it wonderfully."

"Cured, eh?"

"Practically. He never can put any particular strain on that leg."

"And I hear you have a baby."

"We have an adorable boy."

"Cute, eh? I'll bet you think the world of him?"

"Rather," said Dory, smiling.

"Well, Dory," said Wally approvingly, "you've done very well for yourself. It certainly is nice to find you here,

with these fine people, and plenty of money. That your husband's car at the door?"

"My own. Mr. Penfield drives a small car."

"What do you know!" said Wally, impressed. "Were you going out?"

"Presently. I usually go downtown at about noon for a while."

"It's getting grand now, isn't it?"

"Heavenly."

"I'm a little short," said Wally, without preamble, "and I was wondering if you could let me have a little money?"

"Surely I could."

"The place I may take is furnished," said Wally, "but you always need little things, and I'm broke. In all, I need about five hundred, I guess."

Dory's heart plunged. She was not mercenary or ungenerous, and she had ten times this in the bank, subject to the demands of her little check book. But the size of his demand was some measure of the security of his claim.

"Ever hear from the old crowd?" Wally asked, as if he read her thoughts.

"Not often."

"Husband met Bruce Macgowan?"

"Oh, yes; Bruce was here just before I was married. Mr. Penfield knew that he and I were very fond of each other while poor Margaret Macgowan was still alive," Dory said with a composed smile and a plunging heart.

"I wouldn't expect to get it all at once," said Wally, with a modest cough.

"Get?"

"The five hundred berries."

"Oh, I see."

"No, sir, I'd do very differently if I had it all," the man

said. "If I had it here in my hand I'd streak back to the best little job anyone ever was offered, in New York."

"Have you an offer of a job there, Wally?"

"I'll say I have."

"And you'd go back if you could?"

"You bet your life I'd go back!"

"You might be killed on the way," Dory thought. Aloud she said slowly, "I could give you five hundred dollars."

"Where do you get this 'give' stuff?" Wally demanded facetiously. "This is a loan."

She saw that he was almost delirious at the thought of so much money.

"But I can't give you a check," Dory said, thinking aloud.

"Why not?" he asked jovially.

"Because——" She pursed her lips. She was sick of the whole miserable business, utterly weary of talking to this tiresome, stupid man. He was out of place in her sitting room; he was like a dark blotch across its pretty flower-scented shadiness. "I don't know why you come to me, but I am perfectly willing to help you," Dory finished coldly.

"You don't have to be afraid of me," Wally assured her paternally.

Her head and colour came up suddenly.

"I know that," she answered haughtily. "You don't suppose that I am—advancing this money to—to *buy* you?"

"Oh, lady—lady, don't talk as if I was blackmailing you," Wally warned her.

"Because I assure you," Dory said decidedly, "you shouldn't have one penny——"

"Look here," he said resentfully, offendedly, "I didn't come here to be insulted."

"I'm not insulting you," Dory countered warmly. But she felt a little twist of fear in her heart. What a horrible way to be talking!

Wally was on his feet, studying her, his lips shut, breath coming through his moving nostrils, his head hanging a little forward.

"We understand each other," he said briefly, with a scornful little laugh.

"You may understand me," said Dory, "but I confess that I don't understand you. You keep implying that you have something to hold over me—that I am more or less obliged to loan you money.

"Well," she went on in a silence that was more alarming to her than any words from him could have been, "old friendship *is* an obligation, and I'm very glad, if you're stranded out here, to help you out. But don't act as if there was an understanding between us——"

"We can leave it at that, if you like," Wally said sulkily.

"How else is there to leave it?"

"All right, all right," he said. "You're staking me to a trip back home, that's all I care about."

Dory was standing opposite him, her eyes fixed on his steadily.

"You don't know—one—thing—about me, that I'm not willing to have the whole world know," she said.

"All right-ee!" he agreed airily.

"So don't think . . ." She talked on, and he accompanied her to the car, and they went downtown to the bank together. But Dory was already tormented with a sense that what she said meant nothing, accompanied by the significance of what she did. She cashed a check for five hundred dollars irresolutely, doubtfully, but she cashed it nevertheless, and when they were on the station platform she put the ten bills into his hand.

"He didn't have to look up the account to cash that," observed Wally. "Pretty soft for you!"

Dory said a fretted and feverish good-bye on the station platform. It was twelve o'clock; he had expressed the intention of taking the train for Chicago at six that same afternoon. She knew she would not feel safe, she would not breathe normally, until then.

"Here's how it is," said Wally, in parting. "What these people don't know isn't going to hurt 'em. You help me out—I help you out—and that's all there is to it."

"We have twelve minutes before your train goes," said Dory. "And it's long enough for me to say that you must be crazy. I have no secrets from my husband, Wally Oliver, nor with you. Get that through your head. You took the tone, just before I was married, and again to-day, that I have something to hide. I haven't. You haven't a shred of evidence to back up——"

How had she gotten into this ridiculous sentence? This was exactly what she had not meant to say. She stopped abruptly, with red cheeks.

"I may not have any evidence of anything," Wally said, "supposing me to be in the position to need it—which I don't admit."

"Then don't go 'round talking about things you don't know," Dory said hotly. "Children couldn't sound sillier than this," she thought.

"Who's talking?" Wally demanded, in an injured tone.

"You are. I help you out, and you return the favour by suggesting all sorts of things."

"I didn't know I was suggesting anything." Wally, brushing cigar ashes from his wrinkled dirty checked brown vest, said innocently. "You saw that case in the paper the other day——"

"Then *you* sent me that," Dory said, narrowing her eyes.

"Sure I sent it to you. You knew my handwriting," the man answered, unperturbed.

"Come to Mr. Penfield with any such nonsense as that," Dory warned him, "and you might find yourself out on the sidewalk."

"Going to a wife's husband is the last thing I'd do in this life," Wally assured her considerately with a virtuous expression.

"Especially with a lie," Dory commented severely.

They walked up and down the station space for a minute in silence.

"It might be a lie, and it might not," said Wally then mildly. "If I was the husband and I got wind of a thing like that, I'd simply turn to the lady and say, 'Do you deny it?' and if she did, then that'd be that."

Dory did not speak again. The train came roaring up the line a moment later, and baggy fat Wally, in his checked brown suit, climbed on board. He lifted his hat politely from the platform, and Dory walked slowly back to her car.

She drew deep breaths of the warm noontime air; now and then she shook her head as if midges bothered her. Getting rid of Wally was like clearing the atmosphere. She reviewed the events of the last hour as she drove home.

"A miss is as good as a mile," thought Dory. "He's gone, and that's all there is to it. He's gone. He may show up again some day, and he may not. It was the wise thing to do, anyway. He doesn't know anything, he has no proofs of anything. . . . Anyway, he's got his money—more money than he ever had in his life before—and he's *gone*. If ever he—if ever he saw Jerd—and began to talk, the only thing to do would be flat denial—absolutely flat denial. How easy! What could he do, and what could he say, except get out?

"It doesn't worry me in the least," she said in her thoughts, lunching with Mrs. Penfield and the old lady.

But she could not put it out of her mind.

"I should have refused him that money. I wonder what he would have done? He might have hung around town. That would have been dreadful. . . . I could have given him two hundred and fifty—that would have gotten him home. . . . And what does he *know*, anyway? He doesn't know anything. Nobody does. . . . What a skunk! What a skunk! To follow up a girl and try to blackmail her—no wonder blackmail is illegal. I could have him arrested—I'd like to, too. . . ."

Mrs. Penfield was in receipt of an extravagant, affectionate letter from Rhoda, and appeared to feel almost injured in being abruptly deprived of a flourishing grievance. Rhoda in a furnished apartment in Beverly Hills indeed! Where was Alan Perley getting the money to pay for an apartment down there, where everything was so expensive?

"Well, she sounds terribly happy," Dory commented.

"I'd 'happy' *her!*" said old Mrs. Pennoyer.

Dory thought that she would tell Jerd casually that poor old Wally Oliver had turned up, broke, and that she had loaned him a few hundreds for the New York trip. But exactly the right occasion for the admission did not seem to present itself that evening, and she was glad to let the matter go by unrecorded.

It was a very warm evening, and Jerd came home tired. For the first time since Rhoda's elopement Jerd and Dory did not feel themselves bound to dine at the big house, and they enjoyed their own intimate little dinner table all the more because of the break. Afterward Jerd sat on, on the terrace, which was spotted with light and shadow in a lacy pattern by moonshine pouring down through

grapevines, and passion-flower vines, and Dory, after the usual nursery inspection, and the usual replacing of Jerry's blanket and abduction of the white bear, went blinking out of the lighted hall to the terrace, and found Jerd's chair, and seated herself on one of its wide, low arms. She laid an arm about his neck, and felt his own arm, in return, secure about her waist.

"Tired, Jerdy dearest?"

"Well, it's been quite a strain, sweetheart."

"But it's over, isn't it?"

"Yep. They all got off to-day."

"And was it all satisfactorily settled for you, Jerd?"

"Oh, yes. I have no more to do now until the estimates are in. Then they want me to go over 'em. It was only ——" He stopped.

"Only——?" she echoed alertly.

"Well, that they would have liked me to go up to Saskatchewan with them. Interesting men, and some women going—they'll have their own car. I couldn't help thinking how you'd like it, Dory."

"Me!" she echoed amazedly, lips against his hair. "Dearest boy, why me?"

"Oh, well, it'll be quite a trip. You'd adore it."

"But the miserable old leg won't fit in?"

"I'd be afraid. They're going to ride and shoot and tramp—I'd be a drag."

"Goody!" said Dory, in deep content.

"You don't mean that, darling."

"All right," she said drowsily, undisturbed, "I don't mean it."

"You've been so tied since the boy was born, Dory."

"I know, poor me."

"I mean it."

"And I mean it, too. No, I'll tell you when I'm to be

pitied," Dory said, suddenly serious. "I really do pity myself, and it's the *only* time I pity myself, Jerd, when the sound of your motor car dwindles away down the lane, until it comes back again. I live, but I'm only half alive. The strangest feeling of blankness comes over me. Everything that happens to me only happens as much as I can make of it for you, when you get home. I grudge the baby his—his deliciousness, if you're not here. To-day—to-night, when you came in, I was over at your mother's, with Jerry. And coming back, dawdling along, I heard Kate say, 'Why, there's Mr. Penfield's car—he must be home!' You heard me yell like a Comanche," Dory finished simply, "and come streaking in to see you."

They were silent a long time; then she said:

"I don't need anybody else in the world as long as I can have you, as long as you're satisfied to come home at night to your wife."

"Gosh, this is pleasant, when you're tired," Jerd said, after a while.

"Where'd you lunch, Jerdy?"

"At the hotel—right in the room."

"That wasn't much fun."

"It was all right. Where'd you lunch, Dory?"

"With Mother and Granny." And she thought of Wally again, and pushed him out of her mind.

It was fragrant, warm, and dark on the terrace; the moon set early, but the street lights, a few hundred feet away laced the blackness with shafts of silver, and from the kitchen window a double square of glowing colour fell on the shining big leaves of the laurels on the path.

They talked lazily on and on—about the baby, about Rhoda, about the two households, and Mary's household, about plans to go up to the mountain cabin for a few weeks of rest.

"Mother and Dad could come up to lunch Saturday, and he could go right on to his golf afterward."

"We could have curried chicken—I'm sure of that—and a big salad."

"Anything worrying you to-day, Dory?"

"Me?" There was only a natural pause before the "Why?"

"You looked tired—pale, when you came in."

"Oh, well, I'd been carrying Jerry, and he's such a monster, and I just flopped him into the pen, and came rushing in—that was it."

Her opportunity had passed; she was conscious of no emotion but thankfulness. The doors of her heart shut on steel springs; there was nothing to hide; there was nothing to confess. What Wally's insinuations had indicated simply *had not been;* there was no proof of it, there was no credible witness to it, she must meet it with resolute denial in her thoughts as well as in her words.

Wally had gone to New York, he was on his way now hammering up past Sacramento—Reno and Ogden to-morrow, Omaha the next day, then Chicago, and then the biggest city, still snowy and blowy and grim in the clutch of winter. A place so distant and so different from sheltered, balmy, eucalyptus-shaded Palo Alto, a place of such different thoughts and activities and values, that the tiny concerns of one Dory Penfield might well be lost to his view, as she meant him to be from hers.

She slept that night in a fresh sense of security. She had met the dragon, she had conquered him. Walking to and fro on the station platform, she had faced him firmly: "You know nothing about me, I defy you to do your worst. It won't be bad enough to leave the faintest little scar—to raise the faintest cloud between my happiness and myself!"

And he had gone. Gone with five hundred dollars in the vest pocket of that disreputable, baggy old brown checked suit, to be sure, but after all—after all, friends were making loans to each other every day, and what of it? Why couldn't a rich girl, as Dory was now, advance an old friend the price of a ticket East? The check would return in a few days, and Dory would destroy it, and after that it would not be easy for Mr. Wally Oliver to prove any statements he chose to make. Jerd never looked at her private account unless she asked him to. He might, in the course of the next six months, see a balance statement and ask innocently, "Is that all the money you have, sweetheart? Here, I'll fix you up . . ." and that would be the end of it.

"If I was the husband and I got wind of a thing like that, I'd simply turn to the lady and say, 'Do you deny it?'"

Thus Wally, odious and fat and complacent, with something she was always inclined to define as "sporting" in his attitude. One of those baggy, ill-groomed men who think they know everything about women. One of those teeth-picking, nail-cleaning men who speak of a woman as "the lady."

"Sure, I know all about their little lies and weaknesses, and the way the girls scratch each other," Wally's smile seemed to say. Dory remembered hearing him boast, years ago, of his conquests among them. "She begun to cry, and I says to her, 'Why, look here—look here. . . '"

Another time: "'Put that purse back where you found it, girlie,' I says to her."

Oh, odious and insufferable! Dory felt that she could kill him. And to think that she, the dainty, unapproachable, and proud, the envied and admired little Mrs. Jerd Penfield, had put herself into a position to justify Wally's insulting estimate of women generally . . .

But this thought, again, she must resolutely deny. Wally was no more to her than any other loafing, sponging, conceited worldling; she would help any one of them who came her way, and Wally with the rest, that was all.

Dory turned on her face, and jerked an edge of the pillow comfortably under her cheek, and was almost immediately asleep.

CHAPTER XVI

THERE was more than one cabin on the ranch in the Santa Cruz mountains. When Jerd and Dory went up for Easter Mrs. Penfield occupied the larger one, and took the three boys and Julia there, and Mary and Edward and the baby came up for two nights, piecing out the regular accommodations with couches and hammocks.

The early April days were sunny and hot, the place was smothered in wild blooms, bird songs, and mountain fragrance of redwoods, lilacs, wood smoke, and freshly soaked earth, and the creeks ran noisily and full. At night there were wood fires everywhere. "The cold is like a living entity," said Dory, "fighting to get in at windows and doors."

She rose early, during these happy days, and consulted with various Chinese, nurses, and ranchers about eggs and milk and meals for the day. The mists would be rising white and ghostlike into the strengthening sunshine as Dory went her first round; the baby crowing and shouting in his little cabin nursery when she got back. Chaparral, manzanita blooms, buckeye blossoms, scented the air; the tips of the live oaks were pink and furry in the sweet, wet, early light.

Jerd and the Judge, Thurston and Stringy, with little Porter hopping in their wake, went out after the engineers and their men; a road was being regraded, up and up and around the mountain's big shoulder toward the summit two miles above, and the sharp boom of dynamite, and the pulsing of the dirt shovels, punctuated all the spring silence. The smoke of brush fires rose continually into cloudless

blue air. Logs were being dragged to and fro; every hour had its excitement in the discovery of buzzards' nests, or rattlesnakes' holes uncovered by the fresh clearing, or the collapse of a "fill" that precipitated men and machinery down the soft hills of new earth.

The males of the family would return ravenous at one o'clock, and Dory and Mrs. Penfield cooked them their lunch at an open grill in the woods; broiling and toasting, and brewing great pots of coffee that scented the air.

The older woman's talk, when she and Dory were alone, was still filled with maternal mourning over Rhoda, who had thrown her life away, in her mother's opinion, and with poor Jerdy, whose prospects had been so affected by that unfortunate leg of his; with concern for Julia's persistent thinness and scrawniness, and Stringy's almost positive flunking, and sometimes—only on a deeper, quieter note, as if the realness of this grief eclipsed and exposed the unimportance of the others, in spite of herself—sometimes about Tom. Yet to Dory, and to her, too, it was a happy sort of talk, even then.

"I'm glad he's not another Tom—this baby. It seems to make everything about him all happiness."

"But how about the next one? Not then?"

"Oh, no, no, no, dear! It's one of our names, and I wanted it to be this one's name. But I wish you had known Tom, Dory, I really believe he would have been something unusual. He was such an *understanding* boy . . . Just at the end, you know, to smile at me—wave at me, as if to reassure me . . . And usually there were a dozen little boats out there; he could have made any one of them easily. He was a superb swimmer. I never had felt in the least anxious about him. . . . But it was such a hot day the lake was empty. And we couldn't get the Judge in town; we tried all day. . . . But the worst moment of all was when they

got him out—they did immediately, you know—a man we had, named Pat, was out there in three strokes, and there was a doctor at the hotel by the greatest good fortune—or I thought so then—and they worked over him, my beautiful boy, so brown and big. . . . And after about twenty minutes this doctor—I forget his name—said 'Ah!' suddenly—we were all down on the boat-house dock, and I asked him 'Hope?'

"'Yes,' he said, 'I got a pulse then.'

"It seemed as if he was trying to come back to his mother. But no, that was all. It didn't beat again. They worked, and they worked—and I watched them. Afterward I sat there, smoothing his hair, black, thick hair—it was drying out, just as I'd seen it so many times, after a swim. . . ."

Dory's face was deathly pale; she kissed the top of her own boy's fluffy bright head.

"How do mothers bear it?"

"I don't know, Dory. I remember thinking of all the boys, not much older than Tom, who were rotting on the fields of Flanders, and I remember thanking God that Tom hadn't ever hated or feared anything or anyone. . . . And then, I remember thinking of the Judge, that I must see him first of all, when he arrived that night, and that he mustn't find me broken——"

"Yes, I can understand that," Dory said, after thought. "I can see that. I could lose the baby, I could bear it. But I couldn't bear having to make Jerd bear it."

"There had been a lovely young mother at the lake the year before, a Mrs. Pearsall, with three young children, and she had died that winter, of flu, and I remember thinking how much more terrible that was. To have three dear babies grow up without any mother. . . ."

"But then," Dory said, in a silence, "then how can

any law, or any judge, or any husband, for that matter, talk about taking children away from their mother?"

"How do you mean, Dory? When she's a criminal?"

"Oh, no, no. But I was thinking of that case in the paper. That woman down South, whose husband discovered something about her early life, when she was only sixteen, and who is suing to have his marriage annulled, and get his children."

"Oh, Dory, there must be something more to it than that. What sort of a man would do that? He must be in love with some other woman."

"Well, whether he is or not, that's the case, as the papers give it. Jerd and I have been following it."

"He found out that she had been—you can't call it unfaithful, exactly, before she even knew her husband."

"But they do call it that. Pre-nuptial infidelity."

"Is the other man dead?"

"No, I believe not. He's a neighbour, I think. Anyway, he's alive."

"Ah, well, that is a very hard situation for a man," Mrs. Penfield mused, shaking her head ruefully, pursing her lips.

"Harder than for a woman, if the case were reversed?"

"Oh, yes, I think so. Don't you? Because a man——"

Mrs. Penfield hesitated, and after a moment Dory said, "A man what?"

"Well, men feel very differently about these things."

Dory laughed briefly.

"It's a man's world, all right," she observed mildly.

"Well, I don't know," Mrs. Penfield protested, considering. "There's nothing to prevent a girl from *telling* a man, before they are married——"

"Except that it might break off the marriage."

"It might. But nine times out of ten—yes, I suppose it might," Mrs. Penfield agreed, sighing.

"Can you imagine her leaving her children, Mother? Kissing them good-bye, walking out of the house—not thinking any more about spinach and naps, and whether they wear the Russian blouses or the blue rompers? Never to have any say about them any more. . . . Why, it makes Torquemada, and all the other inquisitionists, just humanitarians—just philanthropists!"

"Well, I don't believe any judge would decide in favour of such a law. I'm sure Judge Penfield——"

"Ah, but the mere fact that the question came up, that it was discussed and made public, marks her for life."

"Well, let's hope," said Mrs. Penfield comfortably, "that they're common sort of persons and won't mind so much!"

"Let's hope so," Dory agreed drily.

"Because, unquestionably, she could have given him a divorce on some other ground, without any notoriety, if she wanted to, Dory."

"Yes, but if he wanted the children?"

"Well, then, she should have confessed to him before they were married!"

"But a girl, before she is married, doesn't know how she is going to feel about her children, or her husband either. She's asleep. How can she possibly confess? She's proud of his love for her, his faith in her, how can she smash it into the dirt? *He* doesn't confess."

"Well, then she oughtn't to do wrong things," Mrs. Penfield said, with a prim little conscious emphasis on the last two words that made Dory writhe inwardly.

"Ah, but people are so hard! Good people are so smug!"

"It was explained to me something like this, once, Dory, and it made quite an impression on me. It's as if a girl

discovered, some years after marriage, that her husband had forged, or embezzled, or turned traitor to his country," the older woman said presently, smiling at Jerd, who came up hot and dusty, and threw himself on the redwood needles at their feet. "How would she feel if she knew that the man she loved had had his head shaved, and had been dressed in dirty stripes, and had been locked into a cell every night for several years?"

"It would make her love him more," Dory said firmly.

"What would make you love me more, Dory, and I'll commit it between now and supper," Jerd said, with his bright, wistful, heart-wringing smile.

"Any felony will do, Jerdy dear."

"We're talking of that unfortunate Shotwell case," Mrs. Penfield said.

"Ah, that's a miserable mess. One would have felt that for the kids, if for no other reason——"

"That's what Dory and I were saying. And yet, Jerd, it *is* hard for a man to be shamed before his whole neighbourhood, to feel that the woman he honoured and respected above all—— Dory, that child is actually pulling himself up by the chair. Look at him!"

"Oh, yes, he does that now. He's as strong as an ox. It just wears me out giving him his bath. I'm soaked, and the bathroom soaked, and toys and water and soapsuds all over everything."

"There's no earthly reason Granny shouldn't be here with us," Mrs. Penfield said suddenly. "She'd love it."

"If you ask me, Mother, she thoroughly enjoys a little break, with nobody but Kate to talk to."

"And besides that, she's so dependent on that electric foot warmer. I remember she brought it into my room the very first night I spent at the big house."

"I remember that night, Dory," Mrs. Penfield said.

"And I," Jerd said, simply and significantly.

"You'd had a touch of flu——"

"Throat."

"Throat. That was it. And Kate had been taking care of you down at the Cottage—now let me think, why was that?"

"Porter. He had scarlet—or scarlatina."

"Oh, surely—of course! And we were waiting for Mary's baby."

"Little Mary was born the very day after I came over to the big house."

"I remember. And wouldn't we have been surprised then if somebody had told us that you and Jerdy would be married within a few weeks' time!"

"You might have been, my dear mother, but Dory and I wouldn't have been," Jerd said.

"I suppose not," Mrs. Penfield conceded, with a little laugh. "It's like a dream," she said, "that little Mary's going 'round to two, and you married more than a year and a half."

"A short year and a half," Dory said.

"What were we talking of, Dory, a minute ago?"

"The Shotwell case," Dory supplied composedly.

"Oh, yes! Poor creature," Mrs. Penfield said.

"Poor creature, anyway, to be married to a man like that," Jerd summarized it.

"Yes, that's the truth of it, Jerd," the older woman agreed warmly.

They sat on for a few minutes peacefully, delaying the break for showers, naps, luncheon, as long as they could. But Dory did not speak again.

The day after they all returned home, a Monday, Dory saw Wally Oliver again.

The sight of him was like a blow upon her heart. It seemed too terrible to be true, and left her weak and breathless for a second, unable to move or to speak.

In the safety and happiness of the last ten days the thought of him had receded far into the background; if she had remembered him at all it was as reaching Chicago, going on to New York, farther and farther out of her life.

Now to see him sauntering along University Avenue, looking in at the bookstore and the market windows, was a painful awakening. The bulging big shoulders, the dirty tan derby, the familiar loose checked brown suit, were all unmistakable; Dory, who was coming out of a drug store, retreated within it again, and stood staring blindly at a case of rubber swimming caps, her head ringing, her senses in utter confusion, trying to think what she should do.

"Oh, my God, he is going to our house—Jerd's there—oh, what will he say! What will I say!"

Her heart was beating so violently that all possibility of coherent thought was wiped out by its heavy, sick throbbing. Dory pressed her hand tightly against it.

After a while she went to the door again and looked down the street. Wally was not in sight there, but she had another second of vertigo when she rediscovered him, almost immediately opposite, looking into a candy store. He was just walking, then, she told herself, with a steadying pulse; he was not necessarily turning toward the Cottage.

But this reflection had its disquieting afterthought, too. For if Wally was in no hurry, nevertheless he was here, and apparently with a foothold in the town; his was not the aspect of a person with an errand to perform. Perhaps he had really taken a cottage here, as he had threatened.

She walked home on her own side of the street. Once or twice she glanced back; Wally was not to be seen.

Jerry was in his sand box in the shade. Dory sat down on Kate's little camp chair and watched him for a few minutes. His fat hands were together on the handle of a small tin shovel, and his face was scarlet as he wrestled silently with it. Her little boy.

"I would never give him up," Dory thought. "I would kill him first. I would be a murderer, first. I would be tried for murder. But I wouldn't give him up. I wouldn't have a strange woman come into the nursery, when he waked up from his nap, and said 'Mum-mum?' . . . Jerd would never ask me to, so it's silly to think about it.

"To kill a strong little healthy boy. My boy. What a waste!

"And what does he know, what can he say? Nothing. That Bruce and I were fond of each other. But Jerd knows that.

"How little it takes to change things. I thought myself the happiest woman in the world a few weeks ago. Now I'm thinking about murder. I couldn't let my little boy grow up thinking hard things about me. . . .

"I couldn't go away from him. I couldn't move. I couldn't leave Jerd. . . .

"Killing myself wouldn't do much good. . . .

"And all for something I didn't want much to do when I did it, and that seemed so utterly unimportant; seemed just my own business. . . .

"Maybe nothing in this world is just your own business. . . ."

She went into the house, and heard the familiar voice, "Dory!"

Jerd was in his study; Dory opened the door and peeped in.

"Stokes gone?"

"Long ago."

She came in, and took a deep chair, and pulled off her little green hat to fan her flushed face. Her small person, clad in the simplest straight apron of green silk, with the white slippers barely touching the rug beneath her chair, looked like a child's figure in the green shadiness of the study.

"It's hot, isn't it, sweetheart?"

"Oh, boiling! It's summer."

"Your hair is all stuck to your forehead, darling."

"It's lovely in here."

"Our little walk before breakfast keeps coming back to me, Dory. Wasn't it sweet? Up around the farm and into the orchard."

"I was remembering it, too. I wish we could do it every day."

"Mary telephoned, and says Edward wants to come over about half-past four for croquet, playing you and Dad; she's going to leave Mary here overnight, it's the cook's night off, and Mary's going to have supper here, and is all a-twitter. Mary's to have the couch in Julia's room, and she and Julia and Porter are going to have a little supper together at six o'clock, and you can imagine the goings-on."

"Your father'll be so pleased. He loves to come home and find Mary here. We could have her at the table—I could send one of the boy's high chairs over——"

"No, it's pretty late, Mary says. And Thurston's girl is coming——"

"Oh, that's so."

"Want to drive up to the country club after lunch? I want to see the steward there about Sunday."

"Jerry?"

"Oh, sure. That was one reason I suggested it. He was so cute the last time!"

"I'll take him on the front seat with me," said Dory, "and have Kate in the back."

"And how about the new Magnin dress?"

Her drooping face brightened.

"I'll wear it." And suddenly touched by his thoughtfulness, she came about the low, flat-topped desk to get into his arms, and locking her own arms about his neck, laid her sweet, flushed, serious little face against his.

"Dearest, you smell of dust and feckles and buttercups and all the other delicious things that very small girls smell of on summer mornings. How did you get your little face so hot?"

"Jerd, why are you so wonderfully kind to me?"

"Am I kind to you?"

"You're *wonderful* to me."

"Is it perhaps because I love you, my darling?"

"But—but why *should* you, Jerd? What have I ever done for you?"

"Well, really, I don't propose to go into that," Jerd said, after a pause. Dory laughed mirthlessly.

"You're my whole world, Dory. I haven't a thought that doesn't come home to you. All my life, before that day when Rhoda introduced us, going down to the court, I'd dreamed about you, only I didn't know what you looked like. But the instant I saw you, the *instant* I saw you, I knew that you were small and fair with round eyes and a little frown on your forehead. You were so anxious not to hurt me that day, not to notice that I was lame.

"I knew you were my share of life, Dory, and that it'd go blank without you. I knew no woman would ever sit on the other side of my fire, and scold and scrub and play with my kid, and jump up to kiss me when I came in tired and cold and wet—if *you* didn't."

"I wish nothing ever had to hurt you, Jerdy, ever had to

make you unhappy again," she said irrelevantly, after a while.

"I don't believe it ever will, if you'll just sort of stick around."

She did not answer; she rested against him, clinging to him, the dampened waves and little shining drakes' tail of her fair hair mingling with his own.

Nightmare days followed, in which a sense of impending calamity trembled like an undercurrent through everything Dory did and said. She played croquet on that particular mellow spring afternoon, and she and the Judge signally routed Edward and Margaret Peacock from next door, and then Dory and her father-in-law walked slowly over the place, discussing flowering borders and tree surgery, and Rhoda's affairs, and little Mary, in that leisurely, inconsequential way the old man so much enjoyed.

It was his favourite hour in the twenty-four; his demand, at such times, was always simply for "a girl."

"Send me a girl out here, Mother. A girl! Where's a girl!" Dory had heard him call a hundred times, and she, or Mary, or Rhoda, or even the chattering Julia, were always glad to be the particular girl of the moment. One of Dory's most tenderly amused recollections of him was of the occasion when she herself being in the hospital with Jerd, Mary visiting Edward's family in Sacramento, Julia for the moment in boarding school, and Rhoda in constant attendance upon the invalid, the old Judge had complained mildly, "I walked 'round and 'round my house and garden. Not a girl! I don't like it."

"You were quite right, Dory, you were quite right, we must forgive Rhoda and Perley—we must make them welcome here whenever they want to come," he said to-day, walking up through "Pony Wait," and on between the gracious big white-washed barns and the interlaced fences, all

gilded and tree-shadows, in the afternoon light. "We want Rhoda to be happy—that's all that matters. You put that to me, my dear."

"I? I don't remember——"

"The night we were first talking about it."

"And did I say——?"

"Yes. You said that Rhoda's being happy was all that mattered."

Dory was silent for a full minute.

"Then I was just quoting the Penfield doctrine to the Penfields," she presently said. "For everything I've ever learned of family love and—and happiness, I've learned here!"

It was proof of their comfortable relationship as father and daughter that the Judge could walk on, making no response to this, and after a while say thoughtfully:

"The family seems very important to me, Dory. I don't mean the Penfields and the Pennoyers——"

"The institution," she supplied in the pause.

"The institution. Homes. Full of mistakes and misunderstandings, and the clashing of temperaments, and troubles of all sorts. But working their way through them. Bases. Bases where children can grow up in a world of love and learning . . ."

He had crossed a little stile into a lane leading to a small grassy pasture from which a big Hereford bull looked at them truculently. Dory sat on the stile, with the sunset light enveloping her small figure and shining full upon her honey-coloured hair, and turning it to gold.

"There aren't many like ours!" she said.

"Yet take it in detail, and it's not perfect, Dory."

"No," she said, with her own personal meaning, her own personal heartache behind the word.

"You and Jerd have the perfection of it, now, Dory, with your nursery, and your love for each other——"

"Yet Jerd's had his terrible setbacks."

"Yes. Yes. Very true. But it looks like a long stretch of sunshine ahead," the Judge said contentedly. "God grant it."

"Amen," said little Dory, from the stile.

She put her hand confidingly in his as they walked back along the lane, and down past the barns and sheds and fences, and through green little "Pony Wait," and so under peppers to the lawns, and the blossoming snowball, bridal wreath, and syringa bushes, together.

CHAPTER XVII

THAT night, at the big round table, they had games—"buzz" and "hang the fool" and "faces"—and Julia and Porter came in for ice cream and angel cake, and Thurston's girl laughed surprisedly and shyly at everything, and was complimented gallantly by the Judge, and treated to stern asides from Granny.

At irregular intervals little Mary, from far upstairs, called "Moth—er! Moth—er!" with that pitiful accent on the first syllable so appealing to the maternal heart, and Edward and Mary had a spirited argument as to the propriety of Mary's running upstairs every time. The Judge's suggestion that a round chocolate peppermint couldn't hurt the little thing, and might quiet her, was squelched, and Mrs. Penfield observed that there was one thing in which she had been singularly blessed: when her children had been put to bed they had been *put to bed.*

And all the while Dory was conscious of what it meant to be Jerd's wife; Dory, sitting demure, appreciative, and bright-eyed next to him, was Mrs. Jerd, the oldest son's wife, the mother of the oldest grandson. Nothing could take it away from her to-night, at any rate; under all the domestic give-and-take, Nora passing the asparagus, and Granny assuring pretty Jean Wainwright, "It wun't hurt you," and Dad droning contentedly, "God bless the man who first invented sleep—God bless the man who first invented sleep. . . ." The pride of it, the joy of it, was there, not lessened, indeed accentuated by the sickening undercurrent of fear still flowing steadily beneath everything she did and said.

"Dad!" This was Julia, who had drawn a chair close to her mother, at that angle when Nora must stumble over it every time she passed, "Dad, if a lady was in love with two men, see?—and she didn't know which one she liked best, which one would be the father of all her children, see? Becuz——"

"Rhoda ought to be here," Dory said, in a silence underscored by Mrs. Penfield's "hush!" and by the short gasp with which Miss Wainwright put her napkin over her mouth. "Rhoda ought to be here to say, 'Mother, is that child always going to say everything that comes into her head, because I mean she's perfectly smart enough to know what she gets away with——'"

"*Someone* ought to be here," Jerd agreed fervently "to say *something*, and say it well and fast!"

"Honestly, you're hopeless!" Stringy assured his little sister witheringly.

"Julia, finish your ice cream and go upstairs—and if you cry, you'll have to go up without finishing it," her mother said sternly.

"You're all *mean* to me——" Julia had already begun on a blubbering note, but gathering from the tone of her mother's voice that the stock of family sympathy had been for the moment exhausted, she desisted, and began to eat her dessert rapidly and gulpingly, as one under cruel pressure.

"I'll bet nobody here knows what the greatest common denominator of fifty-one and sixty-eight and a hundred and seventy is," Porter challenged the company.

"You've got it all wrong," Julia observed discouragingly in an embittered aside.

"Tom was my dotter's oldest boy," Mrs. Pennoyer was saying to Jean Wainwright. "Very unusual boy. One of the handsomest fellers I ever saw. . . ."

"Nora, any of that Gruyere left?"

"I don't believe there's a speck, Judge. Flora says it makes everything in the ice box smell. . . ."

"Dory, have you got any of my Victrola records over at your house?"

"No, but Kate says there are five, done up in paper and string, down here on the shelf of the skate and rubber closet. . . ."

"Mother, could you commit a murder and not know it? I mean. . . ."

"I want to ask as a personal favour that Miss Julia Anne Penfield be asked to discontinue her criminological investigations. . . ."

"I'll tell you another eight-letter word with only one vowel in it, Dad. . . ."

Everyone was suddenly aware that Julia was about to weep.

"Come 'round here and sit in your old father's lap, Julia, and try this cheese. . . ."

It was said not quite adroitly enough. Dory was quicker.

"Julia, you know Joan Lilley, that big girl with the red hair that's in your class—well, she was up at the country club to-day——"

"That's not Joan, that's Dorothy," Julia said, with a heaving breast.

"Oh, well, Dorothy. Julia, is that natural curl in that child's hair?"

"Her hair curls naturally and her mother says when she was a baby she used to be afraid everyone would think she was a coloured baby because her skin is so brown . . ." Julia, seizing some cake, and moving slowly about the table to her father's side, said shrilly and rapidly, quite restored to balance.

"I—always—*thought*—that child's hair was curled," Dory said, in an impressed, thoughtful voice.

"No, it's not, Dory! Becuz I was there when her mother was washing it——"

"I would have sworn it was curled," Jerd said, shaking his head.

"I would have taken my oath on it," said the Judge, whose cigar ashes and the remains of whose cheese Julia was now happily blending into a paste.

The days went on: the days went on. There were confused hours of day and night; the boy's nursery, the breakfast table out on the terrace, with a high chair at her side —fears and dreams and hopes. . . .

And then, quite simply and naturally, she was talking to Wally again. Jerd was in his study, working, only fifty feet away, when Wally walked around the side of the house to the strip of lawn where Dory had Jerry playing contentedly on a spread fringed plaid, under the trees. Mrs. Pennoyer was with her.

Dory introduced Wally to the old lady, feeling like a person under a hideous spell. She and her visitor walked away only a few paces, and Wally half invited her to share a green bench with him.

But she would not sit down, nor smile at him, although he gave no hint of anything alarming; his manner was extremely affable, and he seemed entirely at his ease.

"What is it, Wally?"

"What's what?"

"Well, you just told Mrs. Pennoyer that you wanted to speak to me on a little matter of business. What business?"

He looked about, at the distant barns graciously veiled in the spring foliage that spouted up among them and arched over them, and at the big house, an imposing block of white, and at the flowers and lawns and shrubbery.

"Pretty place."

Dory nodded, unsmiling, interrogation in her eyes.

"Surprised to see me?" he asked.

"Well, yes. I thought you were going East."

"I was. But I couldn't get away."

"I saw you downtown here, in Palo Alto, last week," Dory said. "That's when I was surprised."

"Why'n't you give me a ring, Dory?"

"I didn't know where you were."

"That's right, too. Well, I'm at the Cardinal."

Dory looked at him speculatively, said nothing.

"I ran into some friends in 'Frisco last week," Wally volunteered, "and we got into a little game." He laughed. "You know me, when those little lumps of sugar get rollin'," he said, with affectionate lenience for his own weakness. "Oh, boy, it was *sour*. I got the damn things, and I couldn't lose 'em."

Still she did not speak; she stood looking at him reflectively, looking away, bringing her gaze back to him again.

He thrust his fat hands into his baggy pockets, shrugged and pursed his mouth for a whistle.

"Broke," he said eloquently.

Dory's heart contracted, as if it girded itself with steel. Her eyes narrowed, and took on the quality of steel, too.

"Yep. Broke again," Wally affirmed it cheerfully. "Or no," he corrected himself punctiliously. "I'm not quite that. But I can't get East, and I've got to—" he frowned, shaking his big loose head importantly—"I've got to get back," he said. "This country's all right for holidays, but there's nothing for me here."

In answer she merely widened her eyes politely, concernedly. But she made no comment.

"Now, Bruce Macgowan gets up to 'Frisco in a day or

two," said Wally. "He'll fix me up as soon as he gets here. His play opens next week. Know that?"

"I supposed he might come up. I knew he was in Hollywood, and that the new play is to have a try-out at the Curran."

"Sure. He's coming up," Wally said.

"I hope he'll have time to come down here and see Mr. Penfield and the boy."

"He'll do that very thing, Dory. He'll get a great kick out of seein' how you're fixed here."

There was a full moment of silence, during which Dory glanced significantly at the baby in the sand box some twenty feet away.

"I thought he might stake me, seeing how things are with me," Wally said. "But just at the moment I'm kind of hard pressed. I was wondering—I don't mean the full ticket, nothing like that. But I was wondering—you certainly pulled me out of a hole two weeks ago—and I thought, everything considered, that you might——"

His words fumbled and stopped, but there was no irresolution in his eye. It was fixed upon her with a confident determination.

"How do you mean, 'everything considered'?" Dory challenged him.

"Well," he said, finishing the sentence with a shrug.

"Why, you don't think you can blackmail me, Wally?"

"It's all right what I think," the man said uncomfortably.

"There's no other name for it, you know."

He had dropped his head a little, narrowed his eyes, he was watching her sullenly. They were speaking briefly, lightly, with pauses between questions and replies.

"The name don't bother me," Wally said.

"I see it doesn't."

"I need a coupla hundred, and I need it bad," he stated baldly, reddening resentfully at her tone. "I got to get it somewheres."

"Not from me," she assured him unemotionally. "It was a mistake to give you money as I did two weeks ago. But it seemed a natural enough thing to do—for an old friend. . . ."

She had said this many times in her imagining of this scene, or any scene of the sort with Jerd. It braced her to realize how impressive it was, and how naturally she could say it.

"Fix me up for a getaway, Dory. I'm sick of this place," Wally said, with a sudden change of manner. "I'm sick of laying around idle. I've got good friends in New York, and a good job waiting. Two hundred'll do it."

"I never should have done it in the first place," Dory said inflexibly, as if she spoke to herself. She moved her eyes toward him, and saw herself one of a dozen, perhaps a score, of women who had been at this man's mercy, pleading for one thing or another. He loved to boast of them, how they had cried, how they had pleaded with him to stand by them, and how easily he had escaped from their claims. It had seemed only a part of her beloved Bohemia, five years ago; that enchanted world where everybody "did things," where morality was a sort of joke, and defiance of it indicated courage and imagination.

She remembered that one winter, when Sonia had been only about thirteen, Wally and a pretty, timid-looking little dancer named Betta Ransoff had sent out cards: "Walter Oliver and Betta Ransoff will be at home to their friends at 222 South Washington Square," and how daring they had all thought it. Poor little Betta had long since disappeared, but here was Wally, fat, soft, and complacent as ever, in his baggy, dirty brown checked suit. . . .

"Be a sport, Dory, you know this is the best way, all 'round."

"Take Jerry in, Kate," Dory called to the nurse. "No, I'm done, Wally," she said quietly, walking away. She picked up pillows, toys, gathering the rug up in her free hand, tossing it into the old lady's vacated chair. Without a backward glance she walked into the house.

This was the time when the baby seemed most enchanting, when his small, fragrant, powdered person, lying luxuriously in his crib, and when the innocent blue eyes that followed his mother about the nursery even when he was draining his bottle seemed to dominate the whole house, and for Dory, the whole world. She always hated to have the sponging and brushing processes end, and to have to resign him to his flat pillow and his loose pink blanket. He wore but two slight garments: a scrap of white shirt and a firmly pinned nether garment that left his firm little round brown legs bare. He stuck these legs straight up in the air, and hummed like a bee, eying his mother obliquely, and occasionally banging his bottle on the crib bars. The milk receded, lessened, leaving the glass filmed with white.

"Ka-ka-ka-kay!" Jerry gurgled casually. The women exchanged startled glances.

"He certainly said your name then!" Dory whispered.

"Well, what do you know!" Kate grinned, gratified beyond all bearing.

They went about the nursery noiselessly, straightening it, and tempering the soft light of the spring day.

"He's going to sleep, God bless him for an angel," Kate murmured. Jerry's mere going to sleep appeared to her to be a miracle worthy of this blessing.

"You love him, don't you, Kate?" Dory asked suddenly.

"I never seen a child like him," Kate answered simply.

"If I had to go away from him you'd look out for him, wouldn't you?"

"But, my goodness, Mrs. Penfield, he'd break his little heart for you. He's watching the nursery door every minute you're not there, waiting for you. You'd never leave him for long? I never seen a little one his size that would stick out his lip, and begin to cry, if you went out of the room."

Dory stood at the crib side looking down at him. The little warm, soft, loving bundle of him, swooning off to sleep now, but raising softly dusky baby lashes to look adoringly at her, before he sank off into oblivion again. The miracle of him! The miracle that gave any one man and woman a creature like this—all for their own. . . .

Kate came soundlessly to stand beside her; she put his Easter rabbit, a pink velvet atrocity, down beside him. Jerry embraced his rabbit and changed his humming to a low guttural sound of content. He was asleep. Dory stooped to kiss the sweet little brown hand before she turned away.

There was to be chicken for lunch; no mistaking the odour of broiling chicken. And perhaps cold asparagus. And perhaps icy fruit, apricots or cherries. The gay little peasant table would be spread with strips of peasant embroidery—the clumsy peasant chairs would face each other.

"Bruce Macgowan is in the city," Jerd said at lunch.

"I suppose he came up for the play?"

"I suppose so. Shall we telephone him?"

"For what?"

"Oh, to ask him to dinner—play golf or something. Oughtn't we?"

"We could try."

"Care anything about seeing the play?"

"Well, yes, in a way I'd like to see it." Dory laughed and looked at him with mysteriously shining eyes. "Is this my Iago?" she said.

"You don't think I'm afraid of Bruce Macgowan? Bring on your Scotch playwrights."

"You don't have to be afraid of him, or anyone," Dory said mildly.

"Is he Scotch?"

"Descent. Oh, yes, with that name. And Scotch by nature, too. I didn't see it, years ago, but he is restrained—cold, in a way. . . ."

She went on with her luncheon. Kate came to the terrace; presented a card to Jerd, stood waiting.

"Ask him to come right out here," Jerd said interestedly. "It's Macgowan himself!" he said to Dory.

Bruce followed his name immediately; the two men smiled at each other, Bruce's dark quick eyes meeting Jerd's eyes. Presently they were all talking together. Bruce studying Jerd's face seriously, Jerd laughing at Bruce's earnestness and seriousness.

Chicken, and asparagus, and fruit, all so pleasantly served in the mellow green light on the terrace, with the spreading great oak boughs above their heads, and the dull red tiling beneath their peasant chairs. Bruce had motored all the way up from Los Angeles, and must go on to town to-night. Dory and Jerd asked questions of the play, and of the weather in the South, and Dory chanced an occasional query as to some old friend in New York.

"How soon do you go back, Bruce?"

"Sunday night. I must. By the way, Dory, is old Wally Oliver cruising about here?"

"Not—not that I know of. More coffee?"

"No more, thanks. May I smoke?"

"You may."

"Wally's round here somewhere," said Bruce, his eyes crossed as he lighted his cigarette. "And I gather he's broke."

"I knew he was in San Francisco," Dory thought it wise to say indifferently, "and wherever he is he's broke, of course."

"He wired me, at Beverly Hills, asking for money. This was last week. I wired back, but it wasn't delivered, and I don't know how to get hold of him."

Dory's mind was running about like a mouse in a wire trap. A way out! A way out!

"I said I hadn't seen him," she said serenely, "I suppose I was trying to protect the poor old derelict. But as a matter of fact he walked in here an hour or so ago while I was out with Jerry and Granny, on the lawn."

"This morning?" Jerd asked, surprised.

"Yes. I meant to tell you. And then we got talking, and Bruce came in——" And she spread her hands eloquently, with a gesture that said, "What does Wally Oliver matter, anyway?"

"Tried to touch you?" Bruce queried, diverted.

"Tried to."

"But nothing doing?" Bruce continued.

"No."

"Dory, you didn't refuse him!" Jerd exclaimed.

"Yes, I did! He's an absolute rotter, isn't he, Bruce?"

"He is that," Bruce agreed, smoking, smiling through narrowed lids at the greenery above him. "Once you gave that lad a foothold he'd be 'round your neck for life."

"I've lent him money before," Dory added feelingly. The crater was at her feet; she would not pause.

Both men laughed, as if they found amusing the idea of money-lending between the disreputable old idler of fifty-

odd and the composed childish-looking little person in the peasant chair, with her honey-coloured hair and green gown, and her smooth brown skin, infinitely cool-looking on this hot, airless spring day. There were long contented silences in the conversation now, when they could hear bees buzzing out in the sunshiny cherry trees, and smell the honeysuckle that curtained the kitchen fence, and catch the faint far note of a valorous cock far off toward the farm.

"Dory, this is paradise."

The perfect guest, interested and admiring, he lingered on through the afternoon. Bruce walked with Jerd and herself about the place, and met the various members of the family, as they returned, and duly saw Jerry, and was presented to Granny. Dory thought she had never seen Bruce to better advantage, reserved, dignified, and charming with everyone. Nothing, of course, would ever make him anything like Jerd, give his voice that husky, appealing note, and his eyes that mirthful and yet anxious sweetness; nothing would make him tall, and stooped a little on a cane, and fair—when the sunlight touched his disordered hair. But somehow Bruce's liking for Jerd, and Jerd's liking for him, made both seem dearer to her. It was as if the richness of love that had saturated the old farm, and the old white-painted brick house, had somehow gotten into this three-sided relationship, too, making Dory feel entirely safe and content as she walked between the two men, their friendly glances meeting over her so much lower head.

"If it wasn't for this leg of mine, Macgowan, Dory and I'd take you on for your first game of croquet."

"Often he can play," Dory supplemented it jealously, "but yesterday he played too long."

"You should worry about a lame leg," Bruce said quietly

and slowly, after awhile, with such significance that Jerd coloured happily through his clean tanned skin and answered humbly:

"You said it."

"There's only one of her," Bruce added, in a perfectly toneless voice. Both men looked at Dory, who had loitered to speak to the old Chinese gardener.

"I find that out a hundred times a day."

"Happy, isn't she?" Bruce asked briefly. But there was no question in his tone.

"She carries it around with her."

"Not entirely."

"We think so in this family, anyway," Jerd said.

"I'm getting out," Bruce presently recommenced. "I don't know what I expected to find—hoped to find, maybe——"

He laughed unhappily. Jerd did not speak. Dory joined them, and they walked to Bruce's car.

"What night can you people come in and see the show? Could you dine with me, at the Fairmont? Would it interest you at all?"

"Love it!" Jerd said cordially.

Then with a friendly nod of his fair head he went toward the house, leaning a little on his cane, and Dory and Bruce had a few seconds together, unobserved and unheard. The mask she had been wearing all afternoon dropped from her; her small face looked colourless and pitiful, and she laid an appealing hand on his wrist as he sat at the wheel.

"Bruce! Could Wally Oliver make any trouble—he's been threatening me," she whispered.

Bruce's face instantly altered from an expression of affectionate ease to one of keen concern.

"You mean——?" The words fell into silence, and he

and Dory looked at each other. Her dilating eyes and quick catch of breath answered.

He scowled.

"I thought it might be that way—I didn't see how it could be any other way," he said slowly. "He might talk to your husband, eh?"

"He says so."

"And you—you didn't——" He stopped.

"No, he doesn't know," Dory admitted simply, confirming what he had not expressed.

Bruce puckered his lips to a whistle, looked into space, biting his lower lip. Dory eyed him expectantly, but with no confidence and no hope in her tired face.

"What on earth does Wally know?" he said presently.

"Nothing, of course, but he came up to the studio that morning when I'd gotten in from Boston—don't you remember?"

"Certainly I remember!" Bruce said impatiently. "But you and I were having the most innocent little breakfast——"

"I know it. But if he talked to Jerd—and Jerd asked me——"

The man scowled for a long minute, thinking.

"You would have to deny everything, Dory. It was long ago. You and I—after all, we loved each other."

Her eyes were swimming suddenly, she rubbed her thumb across the smooth lacquered tin of the shield pole.

"That's what I tell myself. It wasn't for any other reason. We *did* care—and there was Margaret——"

"There was Margaret."

"Caring—the way we did—is my only excuse," Dory said.

"I suppose we need one." He was silent a few seconds,

and then said, on a different note, "What on earth does Wally think he can do?"

"He's hanging around here."

"In San Francisco?"

"In Palo Alto. I gave him a hundred just before I was married, and five hundred two weeks ago," she explained anxiously.

"Oh! Oh! You shouldn't have done that!"

"I know it."

"He'll only be back—it runs right through his fingers."

"He did come back. This morning."

"Blackmailing. Well, he didn't have far to go to get down to blackmailing," Bruce mused.

"Bruce, could you—he's going to try to get in touch with you. Could you get him away?"

"Sure I could. Don't cry now, Dory, pull yourself together. You don't want to go into the house with red eyes. Do you know where he's staying?"

"I think in town here, at the Cardinal Hotel."

"All right. I'll see him."

The relief of her bursting heart was in her voice and eyes.

"Oh, Bruce, God bless you! If you *could*——"

"I'll stop at his hotel now, and see him," Bruce said.

"And get him away?"

"I'll promise him something—a hundred a month for a year. I'll settle it," Bruce assured her.

Standing beside the car on the shaded drive, she leaned against him, spent with the revulsion.

"I think I came here for a cure. I guess there isn't any cure," Bruce said.

"I'm sorry," she said, clearing her throat, speaking after a silence.

"It's terrible, Dory," the man blurted out, looking away

from her, fingering the wheel. "There's nobody else—anywhere. No companionship, no interest—I go about, it's all dust and ashes.

"And then I pass some place where you and I went in for some rotten Hungarian lunch or some cheap tea—and I remember checking your little coat—you powdering your little nose. . . ."

"I'm sorry," she said again, a little thickly.

"I want you to know something, Dory. I've done a lot of thinking in the last two years. I always loved you—nobody else, with all my heart and soul, but I took that sort of happiness for granted—thought that if it wasn't one girl it might be another. . . . I was a fool. Everything matters. And there are things a man can't ask of a girl——"

"Nor a girl give a man," she whispered, as he hesitated.

"Even when they love each other," Bruce said.

"But what I want to remind you," he began again presently, as she did not speak, "is that you are one of the beautiful—— Pshaw! what does beauty matter? No, it's that you're one of the women who *count*, Dory—count with men. There could be fifty prettier women in a room, and yet every man who came in would be conscious of you—you first. He would want to know all about you, and who the lucky man was—" Bruce hesitated—"the lucky man for whom you smiled," he finished a little awkwardly.

Her tears were dry now, she looked at him seriously, with the colour creeping up into her cheeks.

"Is it perhaps that *you* think so, Bruce?"

"No," he said, "it isn't that.

"There is something about you, the way your eyes are set and your cheeks are moulded, that makes men—think about you," Bruce added, as she did not speak. "He loves you very much, Dory. And he's—he's thoroughly fine, himself."

"I'm glad you like him!" she said, glowing.

"I don't know that it matters," Bruce said drily.

"No," she agreed, with a little conscious laugh. "For I would like people to despise him, Bruce, instead of loving him as they do—as they *all* do—so that I could—mean more to him, do you see?"

"I guess you've got it, Dory."

He hesitated, looked down at his own hand on the wheel, shifting a spark control absently.

"Yet you did like me."

"Oh, Bruce, of course. But when the gods arrive . . ." she said.

"The big gods," Bruce said slowly. And after another pause, looking up, he said, "Do I see you again, Dory?"

"If we come in to the play?"

Bruce merely looked at her. She said:

"Would you as soon we didn't?"

"Rather," he answered, with a rueful smile. "If you were not coming in I would leave for New York to-morrow night."

"Then do that," she agreed eagerly. "For I think Jerd wants to go down to the ranch to work on a contract. He has to go over estimates or something. . . ."

Bruce was still regarding her levelly.

"You could pretend that you would like to see me again," he suggested.

"Ah, I would—I would! Of course I would!" Dory exclaimed apologetically, with a little uncomfortable laugh. "Perhaps I was thinking," she added, "that Wally might go along with you."

"How can I let you know about that, Dory? Can I telephone?"

"To-morrow, at twelve? Jerd will be in the city. . . ."

It was arranged. She made no offer to kiss him good-

bye, nor did he ask it. She drew back from the car, and planted her small feet firmly on the gravel, and smiled at him as he drove away.

The heavy skies above her seemed to have lightened. She was not safe, but she might be nearly safe. If Bruce found Wally in his hotel room—if he were talking to him now—if they went into town and the opening of "Ashes of Youth,"—if to-morrow night they were on their way East—then she could breathe again.

She looked at the telephone in the hall. An agonizing impatience to know what was going on at the hotel beset her. Was Wally there? Was Bruce asking for him?

It was quarter of five o'clock. Passing the opened door at the back of the hall, a double glass door that gave upon the terrace, Dory heard voices. Jerd's voice. And an answering voice. Her heart stood still for one paralyzed moment.

Then she walked out into the soft late afternoon light; it was still broad day. Shafts of sunset were streaming through the oaks; bees were shooting to and fro.

Jerd was standing, leaning on his cane, his face black, He glanced at Dory, glanced away, and she crossed the dull red flags and stood beside him. Wally was in a wicker armchair, sprawling comfortably, looking up at Jerd.

Neither man spoke to Dory.

CHAPTER XVIII

IT WAS all like a horrible dream. Dory could feel pulses beating in her ears.

She looked swiftly at Jerd, but his eyes did not move to hers. She tried to catch Wally's glance, but he did not change his steady stare at the other man.

What had been said, what had happened? Dory leaned against the edge of the rustic peasant table, her mouth filling with salt water, her whole body suddenly weak. Was everything over, did Jerd know?

"You don't have to be in on this, dear," Jerd said, without looking at her.

"Dory and me are old friends," Wally said sociably.

"Mrs. Penfield may have a different idea of it," Jerd reminded him. "You said you want to talk to me about something," he added. "Go ahead."

"I don't know but what Dory would just as lieves not be here," Wally suggested delicately.

"Never mind about me!" Dory herself said sharply.

"Can we sit down and discuss it?" Wally said comfortably and insolently.

"No, my friend, we can't," Jerd said, in a soft, gentle voice that Dory had never heard from him before, and that made her soul shrivel within her.

"Why not?" Wally asked.

"I'm not even going to tell you why not," said Jerd. The arm through which Dory had slipped her hand shook, and his whole body shook. "I advise you to get out, and if you don't care for my advice, I'll find some way to help you out," he said.

"Look here, you've got me all wrong," Wally expostulated, opening his fat palms, spreading them with an explanatory gesture.

"I've got you measured down to a gnat's heel," Jerd corrected it. "Don't have any illusions about that."

"Why don't you ask Dory whether I'm a liar or not?" Wally diverged suddenly, with a glance at her. Dory laughed briefly, scornfully.

"Because I don't need to," Jerd persisted sternly. "Because it's written all over you."

"What is he saying, Jerd?" Dory asked quietly and naturally.

"You don't know, do you?" Wally sneered.

Dory turned inquiring eyes to her husband. She was conscious of the cold, thick beating of her heart, far down below the surface of things, conscious that nothing must show in her face—nothing but courage now, and absolute control.

"What's it all about, Jerdy?"

"I asked your friend Jerdy if he knew that you gave me a hundred dollars just before you were married, and another five hundred last week?" Wally said.

"Of course he did!" Dory answered readily. "You were in trouble—you were broke," she added mildly.

"And you gave it to me because I was in trouble, and broke, didn't you?" Wally asked.

"You can go indoors, Dory, you don't have to listen to this sort of rubbish," Jerd said patiently, in a voice that shook only a trifle.

"No—I'm interested," Dory responded courageously. "Why, does he think he can make any trouble by saying that I loaned him money?" she demanded.

"I don't know," Jerd said, "for I haven't had the honour of much conversation with him."

"I loaned it to him because he's an old—acquaintance," Dory said, with a glance at her husband. "Why not?"

"For one thing, a leech like this is apt to feel that it gives him a hold on you, Dory," Jerd said, as if Wally were not there.

"I see that now," she agreed.

"Have you any further remarks to make, Mr. Oliver?" Jerd said.

"I was wondering," Wally said, crossing his fat arms, in the old brown checked suit, over his breast. "I was wondering if you believe that?"

"I believe my wife," Jerd answered quietly. "Now, you can get off my place, Mr. Oliver," he added in a warning tone, "or you can get thrown off—take your choice."

"You and Dory haven't any friends," Wally submitted, "who would be interested in knowing what she was to Bruce Macgowan five years ago——?"

Jerd turned abruptly on his cane, his face white, but Dory caught at his arm.

"Listen a moment, Jerd. You may as well know exactly why he says *that*. I was playing 'Goldenrod,' in Boston, and I came back to New York early in the morning, one Sunday. Bruce met me—we cared a great deal for each other. If it hadn't been for his wife we would surely have been married. Bruce asked me to go up to the studio for breakfast, and of course I went. Why, there were almost always other people there, Mabel, or Eleanor, some of the men.

"But this morning there weren't any other callers by some chance, and Bruce and I had our coffee together. Wally here happened to come in, and that's what he uses —that's his ground for saying—that's why he's been blackmailing me——"

She stopped, both hands on Jerd's coat lapels, her eyes on

his. Her quick urgent voice hung on the still, radiant air. Jerd looked steadily at the fat, bloated man in the wicker chair.

"Now, how about getting out?" he asked levelly.

"That's your version of it, is it, Dory?" Wally said, getting heavily to his feet. Dory did not deign to answer.

"Get out for the liar, sneak, and blackmailer you are!" Jerd said. "And don't put your dirty foot on my property again, or I'll have you horsewhipped. You could stand out here in the public street and malign Mrs. Penfield until you were blue, and it wouldn't get you anywhere but into jail! Don't you dare mention her name again unless you're looking for trouble."

"You deny it, do you, Dory?" Wally said, breathing hard.

"Deny what?" She turned to him equably.

"Deny that you and Bruce Macgowan——"

"Look out—watch your step!" Jerd interposed, in a strange breathless voice.

"I deny every word of it," Dory said. "You want money from me, and you think you can get it this way. You've gone a long way on your sort of thing, Wally—but you can't go any farther with me."

Jerd tightened an arm about her; she flung her head back, and rested it against his shoulder.

"All right. I'll get out," Wally said suddenly. And to Dory he looked strange; he looked to be only a shabby, bloated, ineffectual old man, round-shouldered and spotted, in his baggy brown suit, moving across the terrace. Husband and wife stood motionless until he was out of sight.

"Now there's only one way to treat an episode of this kind," Jerd said naturally and sensibly, when he was gone, "and that is to *forget* it. Just put it right out of your mind.

He's gone, and the whole thing is explained—he knows now that he can't bully you any more, and it's *over*. Run in and wash your hands and face, and we'll walk over to Mother's and see what the programme is to-night——"

"Oh, Jerd, Jerd, what a *beast!*" Dory said, burying her face on his breast, clinging to him with both arms.

"Beast is right. But he's gone. And all we've got to do is forget him."

"I know. But, Jerd, he's been worrying me so, he's been riding me like a nightmare!"

"Of course he has. But you were a silly little fool to think that you could monkey with a man like that, Dory. You should never have given him a cent."

"I know. But to come to *you*, Jerdy!"

"He didn't, as a matter of fact. He wanted to see you, and I heard him annoying Kate and walked out here. From what you'd said when Bruce Macgowan was here I knew the kind of rattlesnake we had to deal with, and I had it out of him in three sentences—told him that I knew everything about you that there was to know, and would be obliged to him to keep out of our way."

"Rattlesnake—that's what he is! Beast!" Dory said, shuddering.

"We can talk it all out some other time, Dory, but it'll only make you nervous, and get you all worked up, to worry about it now. He's a liar and a blackmailer, and I suppose his sort'll turn up from time to time as long as the world is the world. But he got a surprise this afternoon, or I miss my guess," Jerd said, with something almost like a chuckle, "and he won't show up here again."

"Oh, Jerd, what makes you think he won't?"

"Because he can't accomplish anything by it, sweetheart. He's shot his bolt. He's done. He's been bawled out for

what he is, a skunk, and he's sneaking away as fast as he can make it."

"The vileness of him!" Dory shuddered.

"There's only one thing I blame you for, darling, and that's having any dealings with him at all—letting yourself in for this!"

"But if you knew how it felt to have you defending me, Jerdy—standing by me. It was almost worth it," she said, smiling with wet lashes.

"Don't say that, Dory," Jerd protested. "It makes me sick. Good God, who *would* I defend and stand by, if it wasn't you! You didn't have to say he was a liar—you didn't have to explain anything to me. I knew he was lying the instant my eye lit on him. I'm only sorry that it had to happen, and get you all upset. Now promise me, promise me you won't think about it—won't let it haunt you. Give it a few days, and it'll all settle down in your mind, and seem just what it is—a darned unpleasant episode, but *over*. Over."

"I will," she promised, still breathing hard.

"And shall we go over to Mother's? It'll shake you up, it'll do you good."

"You don't think he might come back, and perhaps hurt Jerry?"

"Now, that's just what I don't want you to do, darling. Get all nutty about it!"

Dory laughed, and went in to freshen up, and Jerd heard her laughter from the nursery a few minutes later. She called him in to see the baby; and she and Jerd stood looking down at the rug on which he was scrambling, for a few minutes, and said the usual things about wondering whence he got his boundless energy, and that he wasn't simply exhausted every night. Suddenly, still laughing, she had seized the child, to be presently her most adorable,

tousled self, with the baby grabbing at her soft hair, and her face flushed by laughter and violent exercise.

A little later Jerd told her that he had telephoned the hotel and Mr. Oliver had left for the city and was checking out the next day.

"Oh, no, Jerd, no."

"Oh, yes. And when I asked where mail was to be forwarded, the clerk gave me a New York address."

"The New Forty-seventh?"

"That was it."

"He's gone!" whispered Dory.

"I told you he'd go. So now, no more worry, sweetheart, until the next thing comes along."

And then not to sleep! To lie awake as if she were never to close her eyes again.

It was maddening; it was baffling. Dory grew feverish and fretful, trying to dismiss wakefulness from her pillow, trying to do away with this unnecessary discomfort, now that the actual dangers that had threatened her seemed to be laid.

But it was no use. The dark hours of the night dragged by, and she could hear the branches of the smaller trees moving in the garden, and see the triangle of white moonlight moving up and up her wall. A cat prowled and called forlornly, and occasionally a motor car swept by, and the sound of it died away into silence.

The dawn came slowly. Dory crept from the room where Jerd was soundly sleeping and went out to the terrace. The air was sweet and chill; she shuddered in her thin wrapper. From the dark house behind her there was not a sound, but the wood, farm, and garden were full of waking noises: little cheepings and creepings, snapping of boughs, surprised squawking of birds.

A clock in the house struck four, and the half hour, and five. The day delayed—delayed. Dory felt her face burning, her hands and feet cold, there was an infinite weariness upon her, headache and despondency. She longed to sleep, she could not sleep.

A strange, unearthly pallor began to spread itself behind the trees; the stars had long ago faded, now the dark began to fade, too. Little cold breezes stirred among the dew-soaked leaves.

Dory looked, through a lane that was a tunnel of dim shadow, toward the big house. There was a faint pale square of pink light high up among elm boughs, where the old lady's dressing room was. For the rest, the whole square bulk was dark, its white-painted walls beginning to glimmer dully in the dawn.

Dory thought of the sleepers, the vital, loving, eager Penfields. They would be waking in a few hours now; old Mrs. Pennoyer would majestically descend the stairs. Mrs. Penfield would emerge from her big airy room, with Julia hanging on her arm, and Porter walking backward before her, and buzzing like a fly. Boys would come coasting down from the mezzanine floor, ham would sizzle in a pan, kitchenward, and the old Judge would open the front door to greenness and sweetness, and draw in great breaths of the air of a new day.

By this time Stringy's disreputable topless car would be humming at the side door, and old Hong come down from the farm with a great basket of flowers cut by himself with infinite loving attention the evening before, and fresh and stiff from a night in cool water, and one of the men would be down, too, with brimming pails of frothy milk, or with the old handleless basket full of warm eggs, to which tiny curled feathers would still be clinging.

The telephone would tingle, and anyone in the neigh-

bourhood of the mistress of the household would be given swift directions.

"Do put those eggs away for Flora, Dory. Do help Kate with the cleaner's stuff. Do ask Hong if there are any strawberries yet. Please call up to Mother. . . ."

And only Dory, who knew them all so well now, knew how often their eyes and their thoughts crossed the strip of green lawn, and threaded the lane, and reached the Cottage, where her own boy was beginning his day of naps and bottles, rompers and sand box, too. Only Dory knew how often her name and Jerd's came into their conversations and their plans.

"What a waste!" she said bitterly aloud. "What a wicked waste of happiness, to have it all, and love it all—and yet to have my heart breaking."

At six she went into the tumbled, cool bedroom again, and crept in between the cold sheets, but even then sleep would not come. But Jerd thought her sleeping when he awakened an hour later, and was careful not to disturb her.

Kate brought her in her breakfast at ten.

"Mr. Penfield's gone—yes, ma'am. He said he thought you'd had a bad night, and not to disturb you," Kate said sympathetically.

Left alone, Dory pushed the tray away, threw the newspaper aside, gave but a feverish, indifferent glance at her mail. Her temples were throbbing, her cheeks hot.

Suddenly she was dressing, her little fitted handbag open on the table as she dressed. Her light coat—her plainest hat; she might be travelling. Her check book, and the new snapshot of Jerry.

She went to the nursery.

"Kate, will you telephone down and have Roy or somebody bring up my car? I've had some news—I have to go away——"

What Kate felt, or looked, Dory neither saw nor cared. She sat in the nursery, Jerry in her arms, talking to her, patting her face with his little brown hands.

When Kate came back, to say that the little sedan was at the door, Dory kissed the top of Jerry's head, and caught him up to bury her face in the back of his neck, where the little curls were beginning to grow. Then without a backward glance she went out of the room, and out of the house. A minute later the engine of her car buzzed, and the dark blue shining bulk of it twinkled in the twinkling garden for a moment, and was gone.

For a while Dory drove rapidly, blindly, conscious only of a sense of overwhelming relief. A letter to Jerd formed itself in her mind.

She would go to the club and write it. She could not go to the club; other women would be there, and ask her questions about the baby.

The Fairmont Hotel then. One could always write undisturbed at the quiet desks downstairs, or better yet get a room. . . .

Bruce was at the Fairmont. That was the thing to do—see Bruce. Bruce would help her.

Eleven o'clock, and peaceful women cheerfully marketing in Redwood City and Burlingame; children in the parked cars, waiting for Mother. Striped pink frocks with belts, and fresh little linen-coloured suits. Almost every child had some plaything from the Five-and-Ten. Jerry was too small for that yet, but what fun he would have, what fun he would have, some day, buying things from the Five-and-Ten.

Dory thought of Alicia Parsons, who had run away with a married man when her baby was eighteen months old. She had seen the baby later several times; when he was

four, and when he was eleven, and twice while he was in college.

"Oh, my God!" said Dory, skimming the broad smooth highway steadily, between gardens and cottage walls.

In a dim heartsick dream she reached the big hotel; registered there. But she was no sooner in her pleasant room, whose big windows gave her a view of the square redstone club, standing in its block of green lawn opposite, than restlessness—a very agony of restlessness, seized her, and it seemed to Dory that her heart would burst in her breast, trying not to remember, trying not to imagine what the baby would be doing now—what Jerd would be doing.

Suddenly she seized the telephone, was talking to Bruce.

"Where on earth are you, Dory?"

"I'm here. I'm in the hotel. Bruce, can I see you?"

"Come along," he said, after a second's pause.

"Are there stairs?"

"Yes. On the California Street side. It's only one flight down, and at the back."

Three minutes later he met her at the door of his own suite; Dory did not see the beautifully fitted rooms, nor the green iron balcony over the bay. She barely saw Bruce's face, that was pale with a sort of reverential joy, that she had turned to him in this crisis.

"Bruce—he came to Jerd last night——"

"Wally? I know he did."

"You saw him, then?"

"Yes. I brought him up to town with me."

"Where is he now?"

"He's gone down there again."

"To Palo Alto!" she said, stricken.

"Yes. But it was because he left his things there. He

had nothing else to do, and he went after them. I'm hoping he'll leave with me for Vancouver to-morrow."

"Hoping!" she echoed bitterly.

"Well, for your sake."

"They said at the hotel he was going East."

"He told them that. But he doesn't want to go."

"He doesn't," she said slowly.

"Sit down, Dory. You look sick."

She sat down on the edge of her chair with the air of a person who does not know what she is doing. There was no restfulness in her attitude.

"He told you that he told Jerd everything?"

"I gathered it from what he said."

"Of course," Dory said, breathing fast and shallowly, "Jerd didn't believe a word of it."

"Didn't?" Bruce echoed eagerly, his tense dark face brightening.

"Of course not."

"What did he say?"

"Wally? It was what he implied. And I told Jerd that I had come back from Boston, after the play, at night, and breakfasted with you."

"That's all Wally has to go on?"

"That's all. Except what they all might have thought—might have suspected——"

"Forget it!" Bruce said, in relief. "Your husband asked you?" he resumed.

"Oh, no! Jerd simply didn't listen. He told Wally to get off the place before he was kicked off, and then he asked me to forget it all, not to think about it, that the world was full of liars and blackmailers, and we mustn't let them count. . . ."

A silence. Bruce was watching her intently. The sun had left the eastern windows long ago, and the room was filled

with a clear shadowless light infinitely soothing on this hot, still morning.

"Well, doesn't that pull Wally's teeth?" Bruce asked, puzzled by her obvious distress.

"Oh, no—no!" she said.

"But why not?"

"Because he may hang about indefinitely—because his mere presence there reminds me—reminds me. . . ."

Bruce considered it, frowning faintly.

"Your husband has absolute confidence in you. Nothing Wally can say will shake it," he presently offered.

"Yes, I know. I know. But all the time——"

Dory sprang to her feet, her clasped hands shaken and twisted at her breast, as though the pressure there were more than she could bear. She walked the room wildly, like an animal in a cage.

"All the time," she said, "I am thinking what Jerd would feel if he knew that I am the liar—*I* am the cheat, and not poor shabby Wally, shambling off the place, threatened and despised, with his head hanging!"

"Sit down," Bruce said.

She sat down, she had flung aside her hat, her eyes smouldered like dark blue stars in her pale face, and she pushed from her forehead her soft dishevelled hair.

"What good would it do him to know?" Bruce said judicially.

"Oh, no good—no good at all," she answered. "It would break his heart—he believes in me—he's been hurt and saddened enough by life. No one has ever meant to him what I mean—what our baby means! But I can't——"

She collapsed; she seemed to shrink suddenly, to become small and pitiful and weak in her big dark leather chair.

"I can't keep it up!" she whispered despairingly.

"You must, Dory," Bruce said.

"I can't. It's all a sham, it's all a farce."

"Life's all a sham and a farce, anyway. Half the people you know are keeping up some pretense—year out and year in."

"I can't." Dory said again simply.

"Isn't it the best way out, after all? Doesn't it save him as well as you?"

She was hardly listening. She shook her head.

"Dory, aren't you making a mountain out of a molehill? Surely—surely other women aren't as scrupulous as this. If Wally—rotter that he is—hadn't chanced to make use of it—couldn't it have gone along for years, all your lifetime, without causing you all this agitation?"

"It's not a molehill, Bruce."

"My dear girl, it isn't if you choose to lose your mind over it."

"Oh, no, Bruce. There's a law that a man can have his marriage annulled for that. There was a case——"

"And you aren't supposing for one instant that a man like your husband *would?*"

"No, no. It merely would wreck his life—it merely would mean that everything between us—his confidence, his peace of mind——"

"Then keep your mouth shut, Dory. What does it matter what he thinks of an old loafer like Wally Oliver?"

"It's what I think of myself, Bruce."

There was a silence. Bruce pursed his lips, shrugged, and settled back to a cigarette. Dory remained huddled in her chair, her legs curled up in child fashion, one elbow on the broad chair arm, and her chin resting in her palm.

"What would happen if you told him?" the man asked suddenly.

"I thought of that." The knowledge of the relief it

would bring her tortured spirit flowed like water into her parched soul. "I would have to go away," she said.

"Why?"

"Because I know him. It would make wrong the—the rightest thing in his life. He would try to be generous, he would tell me that it didn't matter. And in the end it would eat his heart out like an acid. He was jealous of you years ago. I had to tell him that I could have married you, that Margaret died just before he and I were married, and that you had come to tell me so. He doesn't even like me to remind him that you and I cared for each other——

"To learn that I had kept that from him, all this time, that I had been lying to him—deceiving him—like the commonest little——"

"Don't be a fool!" Bruce shut her off roughly.

She was silent for a few minutes, then she began again, more quietly,

"The tragedy of it is that I wasn't lying—that I *wasn't* playing a part. The me that is Jerd's wife, the Dory he knows, is the real one. That other life, the life of 'Goldenrod,' and all the studios and restaurants, and all the rot we talked, and all the conventions we overthrew—that was the play acting.

"To have to go back to that, Bruce, and be in his eyes just like all the other women who took the easiest way——

"To have to acknowledge that you—you, who were lunching down there with us yesterday—had possessed his own wife—before he did——"

She was on her feet again, walking the floor, her face bent, one small fist hammering the other palm, as she went restlessly, feverishly to and fro.

"Oh, no, who could blame him for resenting it," she muttered. "Who could blame any man for brooding over it, thinking about it——

"No, I've wrecked his life, and perhaps my boy's life. Certainly, certainly," Dory rushed on, with bitter emphasis, "I've wrecked my own. And all because—— But it's too sickening! It's too childish. It's not right that a girl should have it in her power to make so much mischief, to sow the seed of so much misery—so much that she will regret when she comes to her sense, when she knows what a sacred thing wifehood is, and motherhood is."

"Man-made laws, Dory, and the more fools we for taking them so seriously."

"No," she said, after a silence, and as if she were thinking aloud, "those aren't man-made laws. The feeling that comes from self-respect and self-control—that isn't man-made.

"Maybe you feel different, Bruce. Maybe it's different with men. But that's the way a girl feels, anyway."

"I would cut my hand off to re-live those few weeks five years ago," Bruce said slowly.

"What wouldn't I give!" she whispered. "Bruce, I'd die—a hundred times over. Just to let Jerd and the baby off scot-free!

"But it's an *impasse*. Whatever I do I hurt them now."

Bruce came over to the side of her chair and knelt there on one knee, his arm about her.

"No chance for me, Dory?" he whispered.

She looked at him gravely, unstirred.

"Oh, no, Bruce. Why, I'm—I'm——"

"You're his, I know that," he said, as she hesitated, drawing back, and colouring faintly. "But I love you so!" Bruce pleaded. "There's nobody else for me. There never has been since I saw you. But you had to go away before I realized how it's gotten hold of me.

"Listen to me, darling. Don't turn your head aside like that. I've been eating my heart out for two years. I've

been seeing you in every woman who came down the street. . . .

"Dory, I swear to you that you are the one and only human being that matters to me, and that I can't get you out of my mind. You could leave him, dear, and in a few months I'd come West—I'd come to Reno, and get you, and take you away from all this. I know you—I know every episode of your life, and you're my miracle—the sweetest, the most wonderful woman God ever made."

"Bruce," she said slowly, "this isn't any use."

"Dory, it must be. It couldn't be that all the rest of my life I'm going to have nothing but memories, nothing but the thought of how sweet you are—what a companion you are!"

"It isn't any use," she said regretfully and wearily.

She leaned forward, and put her hands on his shoulders, and let her face, as fragrant and soft as a rose, droop against his.

"It's no use—it's no use—it's no use!" she reiterated.

"Dory, do you know what it means when a man loves a woman?"

She was walking the floor again; she stood arrested, raised heavy, abstracted eyes to his.

"Come back here and sit down again," he said.

Dory obeyed, and he got possession of her hands again, and she brought her glance to his.

"What am I to do without you?" said Bruce.

"Ah, Bruce, don't—don't *you* complicate it."

"I have no chance?"

"Oh, no, no—*no!* What am I to do, what am I to do?" Dory asked herself, in a whisper.

"I'd make you happy!" he pleaded.

"Oh, no, dear," she said, infinitely gentle and sad, making herself think of him, look at him. "Don't you see,

you wouldn't have me at all, Bruce? Don't you see that there's nothing in the world for me but Jerd—and the baby, too—but mostly Jerd? I'm like some sea animal trying to move on land when I'm away from him. He's my life; there's no one like him——"

"We could find some little place up in Connecticut, Dory, and have the others up, now and then. . . ."

She looked at him, smiling apologetically.

"That wouldn't make you Jerd, Bruce."

"No, but I'd love you so, Dory, that some day you'd find that you were loving me. You'd *have* to."

"Not while I was thinking of him."

"But you wouldn't be, dear."

"Ah, wouldn't I?"

She got abruptly to her feet, and walked out to the little green iron balcony, and Bruce remained in the room, flung into a chair, thinking, thinking, for a long time. Through the opened iron-scrolled windows he could see her slender little figure at the railing, silhouetted against a background of blue, dreaming bay and far blue mountains. Beneath her was spread the fantastic pattern of the roofs of Chinatown.

CHAPTER XIX

SUDDENLY she returned, and Bruce saw, to his amazement, that her face, although still pale, was peaceful, was indeed irradiated with a sort of heroic and triumphant light. She was herself once more, eager, simple, as sweet as a child.

"Bruce, I know what I am going to do."

"Kill herself?" he asked himself inwardly, with a pang of fear. But there was nothing morbid in her aspect. "What are you going to do?" he said aloud.

"Why, I'm going back to Palo Alto!" she said. "I'm going straight to Jerd. I'm going to tell him everything—everything, and I'm not going to be in the least afraid. I—I *want* to, now, Bruce. I was standing there on that balcony, praying—just praying wildly, Bruce, 'Help me! Help me! Show me what to do!' and instantly the thought came to me, 'Go to Jerd, of course! He loves you—he'll find some way out.'"

She was as confident, as tremblingly happy as she had been desperate a few minutes ago.

"He may take it very hard, Dory," Bruce had to say.

"No, he won't, because he'll be so sorry for me," she answered simply.

"It's a risk."

"Yes, but if it's the right thing to do," she persisted, "then it's right to take a risk."

"You wouldn't wait, Dory? See what Wally decides to do?"

"No, there's been enough waiting. Jerd—" her eyes, smil-

ing a second before, were quenched in quick tears, her lips shook—"Jerd won't be hard on me," she said. "He—he is the best friend I have," Dory concluded, widening her unsmiling eyes at him, facing him with so pathetic an expression of faith that Bruce's heart suddenly ached for her.

"But if this breaks him all up, Dory?"

"Well," she said anxiously, "I'll be there, and I'll——"

Had she been going to say "comfort him"? Bruce wondered, feeling his breath taken, and his heart beating a little heavily at the mere contemplation of what he saw in her weary dark blue eyes. He put his arms about her.

"You're so wonderful—you're so exquisitely sweet, true, and brave, and everything a man wants a woman to be, I hope to God it'll all come out right for you, Dory," he said.

"I don't seem to be worrying about that any more,"she said; "I'm just anxious to see him, and clear it all up, and feel free and then, whatever happens, I'll not mind."

"It might mean leaving your baby," Bruce said, watching her.

"It won't," she said.

"It might mean his going away for a while."

"I thought of that. But it doesn't matter. Nothing matters except that I get home," Dory said.

"It doesn't seem to me that any man could be very hard on you."

She hardly heard him.

"That's, after all, the one thing one *can* do," she explained. "Tell the truth, and then let whatever happens—happen."

"May I drive you home? I've got to go after Wally, anyway."

"I have my car."

"Could you leave it here, and go down with me? I'd like so much to take you."

She hesitated.

"I—could," she conceded doubtfully.

"I'll drive you straight home, Dory, unless you'd like some luncheon first?"

"No, thanks, no luncheon." She was hardly conscious of his presence, and he was quite aware of it. She stood in the centre of the room, her hands pressed to her cheeks. "I can do this," she said, in a whisper. "And it's what I have to do."

"Let me have this last ride, and this last talk with you, Dory," Bruce persisted.

"Why, yes," she agreed absently, glancing at him. "I can leave my car here, and have them bring it down."

They went downstairs together, and out into the sunshine of the street. And once again, as Bruce drove carefully through the warehouses and factories of the south city, Dory looked out on the shipping, hundreds of masts and cranes fringing the city water-front, and smelled the hot tar of the paving, softened in the warmth of the day, and heard the whistles blowing noon.

"Oh, the relief!" she said.

"Relief?"

"Of knowing that this is the right thing to do."

"I suppose you're sure?"

"Yes, I'm sure."

"In your place," said Bruce, "I'd keep my mouth shut."

"But you, naturally, don't take Jerd into consideration; you're thinking of me," she reminded him.

"I might be thinking that any man was lucky to have you, Dory, and that the details didn't matter."

"Deceiving a person who loves you matters, Bruce."

"Not in such a thing as this, a thing that it's impossible to talk about; not in a thing that will positively anger and estrange persons," Bruce suggested.

After a while Dory said musingly, "In Jerd's case, I think it would be more that one was sorrowful to tell him something that *wouldn't* make him angry—nothing makes him angry, but that would cut him to the very soul. That would make him think, again, that the world was——"

She was silent so long that Bruce asked patiently:

"That the world was—what?"

"Well, what it was—what he thought it was before he met me," she answered a little obscurely.

"I wish to God that I could go back to that world!" the man said bitterly.

"Meeting girls in society, and then just peasant girls, on the other side, during the war," Dory went on, unhearing, "I don't think Jerd thought that a woman could be—" she paused again—"what he wanted to find in a woman," she concluded.

"All the more chance," her companion suggested, "if you are that woman, that he will be glad to let this particular cloud—roll by."

"That's what I keep telling myself," she said.

"Not," she added suddenly, "not but what a good many girls liked Jerd!"

"He's rich, isn't he?"

"Oh, yes!"

"You knew that, Dory, when you married him?"

"Yes, I think I did. I'm sure I did. The whole family is well-to-do, but Jerd's mother was an heiress. It was her house—the farm was her father's farm. And I think I realized that before we were married—anyway," Dory mused contentedly, "I did immediately afterward, I know."

Bruce perceived that it was entirely unimportant either way; she was not concerned.

"I'm very nervous, Bruce," she said, after a while.

"I'm sorry. Perhaps you're making much too much of the whole thing."

"No, I don't think I am," said Dory. "This is a horrible part of the road," she commented, as they went along.

"I've not been this way before."

"No, this is the back way, really. They call it the road of a thousand smells, because it comes through the slaughter houses and dumps. But it's interesting," she said. "Right here—no, about a mile above, is what they call Death Hill. Cars crash through that fence on Sundays, and go over the cliffs—one day Jerd and I saw four cars, completely capsized, down there on the shore."

"So that you drown if you don't happen to be crushed or burned alive," Bruce commented.

He drove along in silence for a while, and then said, very simply:

"Let me finish this before you interrupt me. I've made one terrible mistake in my life, and it was—you. Everything came my way too fast, maybe; I won a scholarship when I was twenty-two, to begin with; I didn't need it, it should have gone to some other fellow, but I got it. Coming back from Europe, I met Margaret on the boat—you've seen her, you know how beautiful she was, there was plenty of money, and we had an ideal wedding. . . .

"Ideal!" He laughed shortly. "Almost immediately I knew that something was wrong," he said, "but I thought it might be the baby coming—hoped that everything would straighten out.

"However, it didn't. She went into a—hospital, and I came down to New York, and got to work. And there I went ahead, as you know, and there I met you. It never

occurred to me that that was the great moment of my life, that a certain little actress with no particular backing was my chance. I've lived it all over a thousand times, Dory, and writhed over it. My God, if we could have second chances in this life!

"I loved you, but I loved myself more. I didn't see then, what I see now, that most of the time in this world we're building up or we're tearing down. I didn't build. Didn't have sense enough, or vision enough, to build.

"There's a memory of one night that will be with me when I die," he said. "We were all at the studio, and Perdita was there, everybody. You had been having a hard fight, trying to find a job, and I remember that you looked pale, and—well, pitiful, somehow."

"I remember it perfectly, Bruce."

"You and I were in the kitchen, opening bottles of olives and making coffee, and you asked me if it was true that Margaret was better. I said yes—she was, as a matter of fact. And then you said—do you remember what?"

"Every word."

"Dory, if I could live that night again."

"But we never can, can we?" she said dreamily.

"No, we never can. You put your hand on my arm, and looked right into my face, and you said, 'Bruce, you and I can't be engaged, because she's living, and your first duty is to her. But promise me that I come next—this year, or in ten years, or in twenty—and I'll wait for you all my life.'

"She was dead in October that same year, and you married to Jerd Penfield," he finished, after a silence. "But do you remember what I answered you, Dory?"

"Yes."

"I wish you didn't!" he said. And in an odd voice he added, quoting his own words of that unforgotten night,

"'Let's not be serious on a hot night like this! You'll be married to someone else before the year is out and she'll live to see us both buried.'"

Dory made no comment.

"Was that it?" Bruce asked.

"Something like that."

There was a long silence.

"Will you believe that I know now what I didn't know then," the man presently began again. "Will you believe that I'm waiting for you, and thinking about you, and living just to serve you?"

"Yes, I will, Bruce." But her tone was absent. She directed him to take a certain turning; he heard the nervous flutter in her voice, and glancing at her, saw that she was deathly pale. The big white house was visible, through laced green tree branches now; Dory was put down at her own side gate. Bruce did not offer to come in nor did she ask him to.

"Good-bye," he said.

She came to his side of the car, and raised her face docilely like a child, with all a child's absence of self-consciousness and indifference to caresses.

"Good-bye, Bruce, and so many thanks!"

"Dory, I hope it'll come out right."

"I know it will."

"I won't see you again?"

"Not for a while. But you'll come West—or we'll go East——"

She was not thinking of what she was saying; her eyes kept moving anxiously over the house, the garden, and the drive. When Bruce glanced back, before turning his car at the corner of the wide shady road, he saw her running, a small fleet figure, like a child's, up the path.

CHAPTER XX

TO FIND the beloved, familiar rooms enjoying all their wonted shadiness and peace in the summer afternoon was bewildering after the mad hurry and tumult of the morning. To peep into the nursery and see little Jerry sprawled luxuriously asleep, with his drained bottle flung to the floor, and his curls damp on his little flat pillow, filled some aching, empty space in Dory's heart.

She went into her own room and changed her clothes and bathed, and had Kate bring her some tea. Then she lay down on the bed, her hands locked behind her head, her eyes fixed on the ceiling, and waited.

After a while she heard Jerry awaken, and the delicious birdlike voice saying "mum-mum-mum?" on an interrogative note. But she would not go out; Kate, cautiously entering, was directed to take the baby down to the lawn.

"Mrs. Penfield's there," said Kate, "and the old lady. And Mrs. Jay's coming over with Mary when it's a little cooler."

"Take Jerry down," Dory directed, "and tell them I've been in town, and feel tired, but that I'll come down later."

And she lay on, staring at the moony green lights that filtered through the old-fashioned blinds, and sometimes glancing at the dressing table with Jerd's photograph on it, and the high chest with her own, and the enlarged snapshots of Jerry that adorned both parents' dressers, vaguely seeing the roses that multiplied themselves in her mirror, and the dotted curtains that moved lazily in the soft air from the window.

She thought she must have drowsed a little thinking of Jerd, for it gave her no surprise to see him in the soft gloom of the room, standing at the foot of her bed, watching her with troubled eyes.

Seeing her awake, he came to sit beside her on the bed, and cover one of her hands with his. And at his mere presence, and the sight of his kindly, wistful face, with the loose lock of fair hair as usual falling on his forehead, Dory felt a great peace and relief invade her whole being. She clung tightly to his hand; her eyes filled.

"My darling, you don't feel very well," he said anxiously.

Dory could not speak.

"You had to go into town, dear? I didn't know it—I would have waited for you. Such a miserable sticky day—and you've given yourself a headache. . . ."

She managed a feverish smile, still holding tight to his warm, big hand.

"I got home early, it's only four," he explained, "and I heard them all out by the court, and walked out there. Of course I looked for you, and—fool that I am!—my heart just turned sick when I found them all—Mary and Mother and everyone else—and not my girl. It seemed to me that not to have you there in your striped blue dress, down with Jerry on the rug——"

"You spoil me," she faltered, as he stopped.

"I love you," he answered simply.

"Jerd," she said, "there's something you have to know. I'd rather die than tell you, but my dying wouldn't help. Jerd—" Dory stammered, becoming suddenly agitated—"he was right—Wally, I mean. That's what I have to tell you. It's been killing me—all these years since we were married. It's true. I did care for Bruce Macgowan—and I was alone—it didn't seem to matter——

"Jerd, will you forgive me?"

She was crying now; she sat up, and pushed the hair from her eyes. Her heartbroken, haggard little face was close to his own. Her voice was hoarse, soft, and strained, like that of an exhausted child.

"I'm going away, Jerd, and when I'm gone Wally Oliver won't have any more reason to annoy you. I'll be gone a long, long time. And some day you'll forgive me—you'll let me come back and see Jerry—and he'll never know——

"Nobody need know. We'll think up some way so they shan't, Jerd."

Their hands were still locked; her face drowned in tears, her words coming chokingly, incoherently; she was close to his shoulder.

Jerd put his arm about her.

"Why, Dory, my poor little mouse," he said, "I knew all this. I've known it for weeks—for months——"

A look of sickness, of vertigo, came over her face, and she reeled back on her pillow with half-shut eyes. He brought her a glass of water, and propped her with his free arm, holding it to her lips while she drank.

But everything was sinking away—blackness was about her—she could only lie panting, with shut eyes, for a long while.

"He told you?" she whispered, after a while.

"No—" Jerd's answer was close beside her—"you told me, Dory."

"I?" she whispered, the heavy lashes above her sunken eyes not moving, the word barely escaping her exhausted mouth.

"You. I don't know when I knew," Jerd said, "but it was months ago—it was before we went to the mountains. And after I once thought of it, everything made me surer.

In a dozen ways you are a bad liar, Dory. Your friend, Wally Oliver, when he showed up here, didn't shock me half as much as you.

"I've been trying to tell you, for weeks, but the right opportunity didn't seem to come along——"

"Jerd—did it kill you?"

"I remember, for a while, feeling stunned," he confessed slowly. The big thumb over hers did not stop its gentle movement to and fro; his voice was merely puzzled, merely hesitant, there was no pain in it now. "I felt so terribly for you, sweetheart," he said. "I felt that the whole scheme of things was wrong.

"And that's the answer," Jerd went on. "The scheme—the way we are taught—is wrong. We have no right to pick out this thing, or that thing, and say we will forgive every other—but not that. All sins are alike, Dory—and the sins of cruelty and coldness and gluttony just as bad as the rest. . . .

"And the only reason we do pick out this particular thing, is all mixed up with property considerations, with old feudal wars and clan jealousies. . . .

"And jealousy, after all, is a horrible sin against decency and common sense——"

"I've told you. And I don't care, now," she whispered, in the silence. "You've forgiven me."

"Never that word between you and me," he said. "It isn't forgiveness. It's just feeling sorry—as you feel about my leg——"

She laughed forlornly on a note of hysteria.

"If I could die here, Jerd, safe and peaceful," she said, after a while.

"We can't get out of things that way, Dory," he answered sensibly. "We have to go on—work our way through it somehow."

"I feel as if I *couldn't*, Jerd."

"Jerry needs you, you know."

"But to go on, Jerd, feeling this between us—feeling that I have made you suffer through the person you love most—loved most, in the world. . . ."

He was silent a while and then said in a rational, quiet tone:

"Might that be your part of it, Dory? Might that be your job?"

The thought braced her as no mitigating, palliative tenderness would have done. He saw her eyes darken and the trembling mouth steady itself.

"I mean," he said, "for the good of us all, for the least pain to the fewest number?"

"I see," she said slowly. And there was dawning life in her tone. "Even if it was hard?" she submitted.

"It will be hard, Dory. It may be terribly hard. You'll feel it, with Mother and Mary, and all of them. You'll feel conscious that that man is in the world——"

"Wally? But he can't hurt me now, Jerd."

"I was thinking of Macgowan."

"Oh, Bruce," she said indifferently and wearily.

"Shall we try it, Dory?"

For a long time she lay watching him through a haze of tears. The sunshine crept in bright narrow lines through the shutters.

"Jerd, how many men would feel about this as you do?"

"I should think almost any man who loved his wife, whose mind wasn't all cluttered up by a lot of mediæval rubbish," Jerd suggested.

"Oh, no! Not one in a million would feel so!"

"The more fools they, then."

"Men are fools," he said meditatively, after thought.

"And women have let them go on for generations calling their laws chivalry and honour, and all the rest of it. Why should a man do a thing, casually and simply, and forget it, and a woman be dragged through agonies of shame, sometimes as far as a scaffold, for the identical thing—for the same response to a natural feeling——

"It isn't only unjust, Dory; it's stupid. You aren't the little actress who came straight from boarding school to New York five years ago; you are the beautiful, gracious girl I love—who is my wife. It isn't any of my business what circumstances, what experiences, made you what you are—and curled up the tips of your hair, and put the dark blue into your eyes——"

"Ah, Jerd, I can't bear it!"

"Dory, would you be very much surprised——" he began, after a long pause. He stopped abruptly.

"Surprised?" she echoed, her eyes upon his.

"To know that there has even been something good in this, already?"

"No, I can't believe that, Jerd."

"It brings you nearer to me, Dory—it seems to make you more my own. It's as if I had been dreaming, dreaming a too-beautiful dream of love and happiness and companionship; it's as if I had been wandering in a fool's paradise, and had known it, deep down in the sacred places of my heart. And I waken—to find myself still—still in paradise. It's all true, you and the boy, and the house, and our love for each other—only I'm awake!"

"The price of it all," she said slowly.

"The price we have to pay, everyone has to pay. And, Dory, it's opened my eyes so to the stupid unhappiness that people make for themselves, just for old grudges,

for hurt pride—for some stupid old law that ought to have been swept off the moralists' books generations ago."

"But there *are* wrong things in the world, Jerd," she said timidly.

"Ah, yes, of course there are! But it's the clinging to them, the feeling that one can't forgive them, that they leave permanent stains, that's the stupid part. Why, there are persons all over the world cherishing grudges, keeping hate alive——"

"If I had told you—when we first met," she mused. "Fool that I was to be afraid!"

"I don't know, Dory. I was thinking of that, too. If I had known then, feeling as unsure of you as I did—feeling so tremendously the adventure that our marriage was anyway—it might have wrecked our happiness."

They remained silent, Dory's hand lying in his, herself resting back against the pillow, Jerd sitting on the edge of the bed. A late afternoon wind whined softly at the shutters, and the lines of descending light changed from rose to orange on the walls.

"And now we must forget it, Dory, and go straight on. Some day we'll talk of it again—but not soon. I'll not be thinking about it, and I don't want you to.—Come in, Kate!" Jerd broke off to say as Kate tapped discreetly at the door.

"A note for you," Kate said, presenting it. "And Mrs. Penfield says to come down to tea, and that the Judge is home."

Jerd took the note.

"From the Cardinal Hotel," he said, when they were alone.

Dory eyed it fearfully.

"Wally," she breathed.

"No, it's from Macgowan." Jerd read it aloud.

"My dear Penfield [the note said briefly], her happiness is to me the one important thing in the world. I think I can bring it nearer. Will you take it the rest of the way? Love to you both."

It was signed merely with initials, "B. M." Dory looked at her husband bewilderedly.

"He must mean that Wally is going back with him?" she surmised.

"What else could he mean?" Jerd said.

A few minutes later they went down to the croquet lawn together.

But it was only an hour later, when she was in the nursery with the baby, that Jerd came in and that when Dory looked up, above the child's fluffy head, her heart leaped into her throat.

"Dory, I'm sorry to frighten you, dear, but we'll have to get up to Belmont. There's been an accident. Macgowan——"

"He's been hurt!"

"Badly hurt. In fact—— And he wants to see you, dear. Are you up to it?"

"Oh, yes—oh, yes. Take him, Kate." Her face was very white. "What happened?" she said.

"His car went straight over the bank, there where the road is so narrow above the cliffs, on Death Hill. Crashed through the fence—there wasn't kindling wood left of the car."

They were in their own room now; Dory caught at her husband's arm.

"Jerd, is he dying?"

"They say so. They can't do anything. Every bone in his body broken. And, Dory—Oliver was with him——"

"Wally?" she whispered, her dark blue eyes dilated in a perfectly colourless face.

Jerd nodded, swallowing.

"Hurt, too?"

"Instantly killed."

"Killed!" she whispered. And the sound thrilled through the room like electricity.

"The car rolled on him."

Dory stood staring blankly at her husband for a long minute.

"That was what he meant about bringing my happiness nearer?"

"My darling, don't look so! But he might have meant that."

"He did it for me!"

"There is something you must do for him now, Dory. He is waiting to see you."

"Yes—let's go!" But her hands were shaking, and she moved as if quite unconscious of what she was doing. All the way to the hospital she leaned like a storm-blown bird against Jerd, both small brown hands caught at his lapel; and all the way to the hospital she did not speak.

A warm country twilight, scented with grass and pungent weeds, had fallen on the world. All the little cars were home, and under cover now, and dining-room windows glowed warmly through the dusk. To the west the mountain line was lost in a steadily moving blanket of fog, creeping down over the burned dry hills, silhouetted like pink cotton against the last glow in the sky.

In the hospital she saw tumbled trays—Jello and teapots and saucers of red beets. A faint odour of mutton and antiseptics hung in the clean wide halls.

The nurse in the emergency ward, remembering her training, knew nothing.

"I don't know how badly he was hurt, madam. But I've no doubt the doctor will tell you."

She opened a white thick door, and Dory saw Bruce, bandaged, and looking as brown as an Indian, sunk into the unearthly whiteness of his high, bare bed. Jerd fell back, the nurse fell back; she was alone with him.

Standing beside him, holding his hand, she looked down at him with sorrowful eyes.

"Dory, I'm so glad you got here!"

"Bruce——" she said, and stopped.

"Oh, but don't look that way about it," he expostulated faintly, smiling.

"How can I look, Bruce!"

"They make all this extraordinarily easy," Bruce said. "Dope—I'm full of dope. Dory, you look like a little ghost."

"Oh, Bruce," she whispered again, from a bursting heart.

His old kind smile; the old authoritative touch of his weakening fingers on her own.

"Look here, you didn't come here to cry?"

"Oh, no—no——! But all you had to do—and all you planned!"

"I planned nothing without you, and I have you—this is my moment, Dory. I'm loving it."

He shut his eyes. His face was quite bloodless, and the deep sockets that held them were sunken. Dory watched him fearfully.

"Nice old priest came in to see me," Bruce murmured. "He's coming in in the morning. Fine old boy. I talked to him. I asked him about there being no greater love——"

His voice died away; Dory felt her heart hammering

madly. Was he dying? She bent suddenly and kissed his forehead.

"—than this," Bruce finished his sentence suddenly and clearly, opening his eyes. For one second he gave her again his brilliant smile, full of his own particular sophistication, his own wisdom. Then he sank down again, and the light died out, and his lids slowly—unnaturally—fluttered shut.

"Bruce!" Dory said sharply, bending over him. The sound lingered in the air; a nurse was beside her. Another nurse——

"Get Dr. Robinson, Miss Daniels. Lift him up on that side," the nurse said quickly. Dory was conscious that other persons had come in, and that Jerd's arm was about her before she fainted away.

CHAPTER XXI

MORE than three years later, on a certain balmy September afternoon, Porter Pennoyer senior sat under the oaks in the side garden of the old Penfield house, quite alone.

Alone to the extent of not having any person within hearing, or paying him any attention. But far from solitary. The whole green garden hummed with life and stirred with movement, bees and birds were active in every direction, and human voices came at intervals from all sides. Up at the farm someone was hammering briskly; nearer, where the garage was out of sight behind some oaks, young Sterling Penfield was whistling as he washed a car, with much swishing and splashing of a hose. In a hammock near by the older son, Thurston, was sound asleep, with the late sunshine slanting into his closed eyes in a hard, brown, lean young face.

A young girl, entirely unidentified by the solitary watcher, had come out upon the croquet court and was marshalling the heavy balls about with a brass-bound mallet. Farther up the green, where a freshly painted white fence shut off the farm region, the visitor could see two older children, a noisy little girl of twelve or more and the squarely built younger boy who was his own son. These two were fighting for the possession of a little tawny fat Shetland pony with white hair hanging in his eyes; Porter senior could hear their voices, "You're hurting him, Porter! You let me have him, Julia. I said 'dibs on the pony' before lunch!"

Near by, only fifty feet away on the green lawn, four

quite little children were toddling about and murmuring together, in the charge of nurses; other maids had come down from the house and were sitting on the grass. Their white gowns and the small children's white clothing made spots of light in the deep rich green of the garden.

While he sat idly watching there was a majestic rustle on the grass; before he could turn or get to his feet his mother had settled into the basket chair beside him.

"You oughtn't sit there in the shade after tennis," Mrs. Pennoyer said, freeing her wools and needles with little jerks of her fine old hands, and eying him through her strong glasses. "You'll get your death."

"I put my sweater on, Mother. It's warm out here, anyway."

"You still think you've got to get back to-morrow, Port?"

"Oh, I must, Mother! I've been here more than two weeks."

"It's all nonsense, livin' in a place like that," the old lady stated decidedly.

"Hate to leave Port," the man mused aloud, only half hearing her.

"He's a good child," his grandmother stated. "Mary spoils him. She spoils all the children. But he's no more trouble than a kitten."

"When it's your only kid, and his mother dead, you can stand the idea of his being a little—favoured," Porter senior said drily.

"Children need whippin's, and they need discipline," Mrs. Pennoyer affirmed severely. "Oh, I sit by," she added, "and I never open my mouth. They wun't pay any attention to me, so why should I? But I raised my three without . . ."

"Dory seems to fit in here pretty well?" Porter said

dreamily, after a while, when he had assented and agreed vaguely to various propositions, and there was silence again. "It's funny to me to find her here, as much established as any of us, and with Jerd's children. She was such a lonely, scared-looking little thing five years ago, when she brought Porter down to Cuba, after Betty's death."

"Dory isn't Mary," the old lady challenged him promptly. "She's a real good child, but she can't take Mary's place. For Mary to run off to Rhoda—here it is three days now—and leave this place at sixes and sevens—well, I wouldn'ta done it, I know that."

"Seems to me Dory fills the bill pretty well."

"That's just because she's good-lookin'."

Porter laughed.

"No, it's not that. But she really has thrown herself into it heart and soul since Mary went. Running her own children, and Rhoda's little girl—that's not so simple. Which is Mary's, down there, and which is Rhoda's?" he asked, indicating the baby group.

"The red-headed one's Mary's. Rhoda's is the other little girl—she's 'most as big as little Mary now. The boys are Dory's—Jerry is the one on the wagon, and that's Tom with the spade."

"I know them all, but I get them mixed up."

"Rhoda would have had another, a few weeks from now, if it hadn't been she was taken sick."

"Poor kid, she married a sort of washout, didn't she?"

"Oh, no, he looks real handsome when he gets a servant's part to play in a film, and that makes up for his not payin' the rent, and tryin' to borrow money from Jerd, and leavin' Rhoda in an apartment, sick, with Patsy on her hands!" the old lady said, in biting sarcasm. "I don't know why they want to name 'em all Patsy and Nancy nowadays, like coloured folks," she added dis-

contentedly. "Scrappy, that's what Jerd and Dory call their little girl. Scrappy! Well—if they like it——"

"It's a wonderful home for my little boy to grow up in," Porter thought. "I couldn't wish him any better. I've got to think of that. He couldn't have a lovelier home. . . . Betty's baby, that we used to weigh every Sunday, and mix little bottles for . . ."

"Port, you ought to marry again."

"I know it, Mother."

The young man in the hammock now awakened with a single rending yawn, and was out on the lawn, and at the young lady's side, with a bound.

"Come on, now, we'll have a game," he shouted. "You and me, Helen. Come on. We challenge the world. Where's Stringy? Come on, Uncle Port."

"I can't do it, Thurston. We were playing tennis all afternoon."

Sterling and Mary Jay now appeared from the direction of the garage.

"I came over to haul my child home," Mary stated. "But if she's good I'll play a game. Come on, Stringy—you and me. Who's got a coin? Heads. It's a head."

"It's a tail," said Stringy. "You start. Come on, Helen—shake a leg."

"Really, the coarseness of you undergraduates," said Helen, making the first wicket neatly.

"You'll just be about the middle wicket when tea comes out."

"What did you say, Granny?"

"Come to me, partner. Don't give him a shot!"

"'Said that if your mother was here you wouldn't start a game at this time of the afternoon."

"We can stop for tea and go on. Kate! Look out for those kids. I'm sending Miss Withers's ball off that way!"

"And I hope you break your leg doing it."

"Remember you're dead on two balls, Thurston."

"Come to me, partner. Don't try any fancy business. Take it easy."

In the greenness and sweetness of the late afternoon the children played on absorbedly, as unaffected by their elders' nearness as so many grazing foals. From the kitchen regions a strong voice said firmly, "Look out that you don't tip it, Kate. It's half grease, it'll be the death of your apron." Little Porter Pennoyer came down from the farm and sat on the grass beside his father's chair; Julia cantered offensively and ostentatiously by on the Shetland, grew bored, abandoned him, and came over to the croquet green in turn.

Dory appeared with rusks and milk on a tray.

"Porter, save me that chair next you—here, put Julia's hat on it. I'm taking the children some tea—I'll be right back!"

"Port, score for us, will you? Stringy's dead on the world."

"But in place, don't forget that."

"Hit him, Thurston! But get beyond him. . . ."

"Lord, I hate to leave this place," Porter said, with a long sigh.

"Mary'll feel real bad that you couldn't wait for her."

"We had a telegram from Mother, Granny," Dory announced, coming back, and taking her chair. "She gets here to-morrow afternoon."

"Goody!" Julia said shrilly.

"Good work!" said one of the sons from the lawn.

"Oh, and, Thurston—Rhoda with her, for a long visit. Patsy's not to go back."

"Goody!" Julia squeaked again. There was general wel-

come for the news. "Then you'll have to go back to your own house, Dory," the little girl predicted.

"I wish you wouldn't shriek that way, Julia, when I'm shooting," Helen complained.

"I expect we'll see a change in Rhoda. She wun't be the happy, light-hearted girl she was when that feller——"

"No, Rhoda's just the same—just as funny, and just as much of a chatterbox. Jerd and I saw her when we were South last year, you know——"

"Do you like Perley, Dory?"

"Well, Porter, I do and I don't. He's a conceited, stupid sort of fellow, but he——"

"Dory!"

"Well, what is it, darling?"

"Porter, you interrupted Dory."

"But, Dad, Roy's going downtown now!"

"Well, what is it, dear?"

"It's fifty cents, Dory. And gee, it's a kick! You 'tach it onto any 'electric light socket——"

"Go up to my purse, and don't wake the little baby, and if she's kicked off her blue blanket pull it up——"

"Here, I have fifty cents, Dory. Here you are, old man. Give your dad a kiss."

"Porter Pennoyer, what do you say?"

"Thanks, Dad!"

"Rhoda marri'd a scamp, and that's the long and short of it, but she wun't admit it, and she wun't give in——"

"Think of the fun of having old Rhoda here! She hasn't been home since she was married——"

"See that kid jump that gate? I can't get over the way he's grown."

"Porter? Oh, and he plays ball——"

"Come to me, partner. It's our one chance."

"You're dead on me, Helen. Don't forget that."

Dory was in dark blue linen with white shoes and a white hat. Her eyes were very blue in a rather pale face; her honey-coloured hair was pressed against her forehead in little wings and drakes' tails.

"If you'd gotten to Mary that time you'd be out, Stringy."

The small children straggled by; Dory's four-year-old, his face a study in grief, leaned his little warm, linen-clad form against her shoulder.

"But, Jerry, don't you see it's getting too cold for the little ones? If you go nicely with Kate then Patsy and Tommy'll go, too."

"Katie yaffed at me."

"Katie laughed at you? Then you must have done something funny, and everyone likes to do that."

"She said I was a Yankee!"

"And you'd think he was, Mrs. Penfield, if you could hear him bargaining with the other children."

"But Yankees are very nice, darling. Grandfather's a Yankee."

"So you *see* now, Jerry. And don't you and I fool the others about first bath every morning of our lives? Who else ever gets first bath away from me? You come along with Patsy and Tommy, and you'll see the surprise I've got for you. . . ."

Then it was Julia, who came up to cough exhaustively over her grandparent.

"That cough medicine might just as well be so much water," said Mrs. Pennoyer darkly.

"I haven't taken it for about four days," gasped Julia, between spasms.

"Hasn't she, Dory?" A light sprang into the old lady's eye.

"Oh, Julia, we did forget it! But—but not for four days," Dory explained eagerly, apologetically.

"I don't know what your mother will say to you, Julia. The one thing she said was that you were to take your cough medicine," Mrs. Pennoyer observed dispassionately, adroitly reaching the older culprit through the less accessible one. "It's about time she got home, I guess!"

The force of this broadside was mitigated for Dory by the fact that Sterling had now come up on her other side and was importuning her in a low tone.

"Could we ask Helen to stay for supper, Dory? She happened to say that there's nobody home but her grandfather——"

"But, Stringy darling, it's Thursday, and Kate and Flora are mad to see the picture at the Stanford, and—however——

"Kate," said Dory in a low tone over the tea tray, "how about my asking Miss Withers to stay to dinner? I'll help clear——"

"It's nothing to me, if the steaks come, Mrs. Jerd," said Kate, in the same lowered tone. "But Flora was fit to be tied——"

"Helen!" Dory called to the croquet victor, "how about staying to have dinner with us to-night?"

"Oh, I'd love to, thank you, Mrs. Penfield!"

"Kate, why on earth wun't that man get the meat here in time? Last night it was the liver——"

"He says he never gets the order until noon, and the boys——"

"Your mother always orders before breakfast," Mrs. Pennoyer observed.

"And I ought to," Dory exclaimed penitently. "But I have Scrappy to nurse, and get started for the day, and the boys always come in and rough-house Jerd——"

"Say, Dory!" This was Thurston, drinking his tea sitting on the lawn at her feet. "Did the cleaner say anything about my vest?"

"Thurston, do you know I believe I threw that away in the box! Kate and I were remembering to-day. There was some pink tissue paper in the bottom of the box, you know, and my pink linen in the top—and whether——"

"Oh, help! My best vest."

"I know, and I feel terribly about it. But there is just this *one* chance. There are a lot of those empty boxes in the top of the linen closet——"

"Give a wearied old embittered man, tired with the travail of life," the old Judge's voice boomed musically, "a cup of tea! And, Julia, come sit on your father's lap, and practise repose—that beautiful quality known to the French as '*reposé*'. . . ."

"I'll give you a piece of news, Dad, that will rest you!" Dory said radiantly. "Mother gets home at five to-morrow!"

"And bringing with her——" the old lady added.

"Who do you think!" Dory interrupted.

"Well, Dory——" Mrs. Pennoyer said patiently, arrested.

"I do beg your pardon, Granny!"

"She's bringing Rhoda," Mrs. Pennoyer finished briefly.

"No!" The old Judge brightened.

Dory herself carried the brimming cup to her father-in-law, and kissed the silver top of his head when she had delivered it.

"Won't it be good to see old Rhoda!"

"No?" the Judge repeated, his face one broad smile, as he stirred his tea over and about Julia's restless head. "No? Well, you don't say so—you don't say so!"

"I'll bet you Rhoda's got a lot more sense than when she went away."

"Then we keep Patsy, Kate. You might just as well go on having her sleep——"

"You'll see some croquet when Rhoda gets here, Helen."

"Oh, Judge, I wish you had seen this game! It was *terrible*. I was dead on the world, and Stringy——"

"But she'll have to be awfully quiet, Stringy. She's been ill, you know, and Mother says she looks like a little ghost."

"And her littul—babee—di-yud," Julia said pitifully, drawlingly, to her Uncle Porter.

"We'll all fatten her up and jolly her along, and she'll be a different woman in two weeks," Mary said hastily, with a glance at her father's face.

"Oh, we'll spoil her. And she has that glorious Patsy," Dory added. "I think she ought to have her own old room, don't you, Granny?"

"Oh, Dory, I have that. I have that."

"I know you have, Julia. But couldn't you go back to the little room, because just as soon as she's well enough Rhoda will want to have Patsy with her——"

"Unless my dear sister Rhoda has changed considerably, she will be back in her own room to-morrow night," Thurston said, with a brief laugh, "and Miss Julia Pennoyer Penfield will be out in the open, seeking water."

"I don't care, you all hate me, and I hate everyone, and I think you're all pigs!" Julia screamed, struggling to free herself from her father's arms.

"Never mind, Julia, I'm crazy about you!" This was Jerd, coming out with his cane, and his slightly stooped broad shoulders, and the fallen bright lock of hair across

his kindly eyes. "Hello, everyone," he said. "Hello, Porter."

Porter Pennoyer saw his face as he stooped to kiss his wife; saw hers as she raised it.

The children scattered by ones and twos, and peace possessed the older group on the lawn. September sunset was sweet over the world; there were long mellow shadows tangled among the white roofs and dry yellow foliage of the farm, rising beyond hedges and fences toward the east. Overhead the great spreading branches of the mighty oaks made a lofty tent, through which the streamers of the sun penetrated with a strange glowing brightness, falling in warm pools upon the lawn and the flowers below.

The big house, square, imposing, its mansard windows open to afternoon airs, threw its own majestic shadow, and beyond it, through the trees, Porter Pennoyer could see the square brick Cottage, where the younger Penfields had set up their own household gods.

Mallets and balls still lay on the croquet lawn, each throwing its own little blot of shadow; there were carts and trains on the green where the little children had played. The neglected Shetland was looking over the white low bars of "Pony Wait" now; an Airedale lay at Jerd's feet, and Stringy played with the ears of a hideous, wobbly bull pup, and fed it bits of toast as he lay on the grass. Somewhere toward the south garden the old Chinese was watering; he could not be seen, but the spray from the hose rose into the air like a silvery fountain.

"We have our troubles, like the rest of the world, I suppose," Porter Pennoyer said thoughtfully.

"I'll say we do!" Thurston, who was in love, contributed fervently.

"Mary lost that beautiful boy, and now Rhoda's been ill, and married to that scamp——"

"And rain on the day of the big game," the Judge murmured, his lips against Julia's straight bobbed hair. "Rain —rain—rain——"

"I seemed to have all mine before I met Jerd."

"I don't know, Dory. What about what's-his-name getting killed, just after you'd been talking to him?"

"Oh, Mr. Macgowan—oh, yes."

"You spoke to me about him that day in Havana, Dory."

"Did I? I'd forgotten that. Did Mother write you that he had come out here for the trial of a play, and was killed driving into town?"

"What, from Palo Alto here?"

"Yes—right up the road here. He and another man named Oliver—both killed. Yes, that was a sorrow for me, sure enough," Dory admitted.

"It seems ridiculous to me not to have you wait until Mary and Rhoda get here, Porter."

"I have my reservations made, Mother."

"Dory!" It was Julia's voice, from an upper window in the big white house behind them. "Your baby's awake!"

"Watch her for me, Julia. I'm coming right in!"

"That is, not being stone deaf, the child awakened when her dear Aunt Julia went upstairs," Stringy said lazily.

Dory rose, small and fair in her dark-blue linen, and turned smiling eyes to Jerd.

"Yes, I'm going in, too," Jerd said. He put his free arm about her, and she fitted her step to his, and they went toward the house together.

THE END